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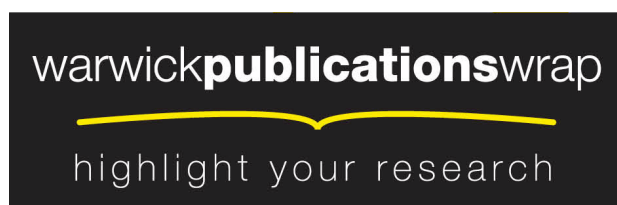
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Reading Spain's "African Vocation":

The figure of the Moorish priest in three fin de siglo novels (1890-1907)¹

When Salustio Meléndez, the narrator of Emilia Pardo Bazán's 1890 novel Una cristiana, first encounters the Moroccan-identified Franciscan friar Silvestre Moreno, he is multiply disconcerted. Not only the priest's difference from familiar literary and artistic models of priesthood, but also his airy declaration that "moro, ya lo fui" leave Salustio utterly at a loss as to how to "read" him (Pardo Bazán 95). Five years later, Salustio's difficulties are echoed by the narrator of Galdós's Nazarín, as he experiences similar problems in "reading" the eponymous and equally ambiguous "clérigo musulmán-mancheño" (Galdós 30) who is the protagonist of that novel, "[el] para mí extrañísimo e incomprendible Nazarín" (17). Another twelve years on, and another ethnically ambiguous priest, Padre Juan – the Andalusian-Moorish Jesuit protagonist of Sofía Casanova's 1907 novel Lo eterno – finds himself scrutinized, interpreted and re-interpreted. This time, however, it is Juan who struggles to define himself against familiar models of priesthood and masculinity, while the Church (in the person of Juan's Bishop uncle) has absolutely no doubt of how to "read" him: "Conociéndote bien [...] te hicimos entrar en el Seminario [...] Para salvarte de ti propio [...] te quisimos ver sacerdote" (Casanova 16-17). Oddly, despite being their defining characteristic, discussion of these three characters' African connection has rarely figured in critical readings of the three texts. This is not entirely unexpected, given that the scholarly debate about the extent to which experiences and representations of Orient and Empire have defined modern European culture has only recently begun to take into account literary and cultural responses to Spain's renewed colonialist project in

the second half of the “long” nineteenth century – or, indeed, even to recognize that such responses exist. As Alda Blanco has observed, the seeming absence of any reference to this project in the literature of the period is “uno de los más extraordinarios silencios en la producción literaria no solamente a finales de siglo, sino a lo largo de todo el siglo XIX” (6).

The silence that Blanco observes is not limited to critical readings of Spanish texts. A central problem in the study of Spanish representations of Orient and Empire is that Spain has been almost entirely absent from theoretical studies of the role of culture in European imperialism ever since Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). My analysis builds on recent works by Carl Jubran and Ignacio Tofiño-Quesada, among others, which take issue with Said and his successors for their omission of Spain and the Spanish empire from their theorization of European Orientalism. In his study *Spanish Internal Orientalism*, Jubran takes the position that the rapid expansion in “Hispano-Arabism” – Spanish studies of Arabic – from the 1880s, closely allied with the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, must be considered alongside the French and British Orientalism outlined by Said. He argues that “Hispano-Arabism is 'orientalism' [...] although the Spanish model is different, it is still implicated in colonialist and imperialist interest with regard to Spain's relation to Morocco” (24). At the centre of his study is the question of how Hispano-Arabism, which “started out as the sincerely secular and liberal attempts to follow the 'institutionalist' trends in the 1880s”, turned into “one of the principal mechanisms by which Spain would demonstrate its privileged past with the Arabs and defend its colonialist venture in Morocco” (41-2). Tofiño-Quesada, too, investigates the way that Spain's Islamic past became a rhetorical tool for supporting the return to expansionist policies from the 1880s onwards. Like Jubran, he demonstrates the incapacity of Said's concept of Orientalism to

account for the Spanish situation, arguing instead for a concept of “Spanish orientalism” that is characterized by paradox – “the narrative of a country that Orientalizes and indeed colonizes the Other [...], but which is described as Oriental itself” (130). The consequence of this paradox, as Lou Charnon-Deutsch acknowledges, is that “Spain’s fascination with the exotic is a complex phenomenon” (262). This complexity is without doubt a contributing factor to the dual absence I signaled above – of Spain from interdisciplinary studies of Orient and Empire, and of Orient and Empire from literary and cultural studies of Spain. The question, of course, is how it might condition newly recovered representations of Spain’s relationship with actual and potential colonies, for as Susan Martin-Márquez suggests, “If Spaniards demonstrated ambivalence concerning their own ‘African-ness,’ then their artistic and literary depictions of Africa and Africans (...) might be expected to reveal acute tensions as well” (8).

My intention in this essay is to contribute to the growing corpus of scholarship that seeks to counter the “silence” indicated by Blanco, and to confront the tensions and complexities recognized by Charnon-Deutsch and Martin-Márquez. These studies show how responses to the colonial question – in connection with Spain’s American as well as African colonies – are sometimes to be found among the vast majority of nineteenth-century Spanish texts that remain outside the canon and thus largely unstudied. These might include works by Spain’s women writers, or by men and women based outside the metropolitan axis of Castile-Madrid, or writing popular or ephemeral fiction and poetry (e.g. Hooper, Pozzi). At other times, uncovering these responses necessitates re-reading, with fresh eyes, familiar works by familiar authors, about which much has already been written (e.g. Fiddian, Martin-Márquez, McDermott). The authors whose works form the

basis of this essay cover the whole of this spectrum: the canonical novelist par excellence Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920); his friend and contemporary the Galician novelist Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851-1921), whose reputation is currently undergoing something of a renaissance, particularly among feminist critics; and Pardo Bazán's compatriot and acquaintance, the little-known expatriate novelist, poet and journalist, Sofía Casanova (1861-1958).

The particular focus of this essay is the paradoxical appearance of Moorish, or Moroccan-identified priests in three novels published by these authors between 1890 and 1907 – that is, at the height of Spain's renewed colonial campaigns in Africa. The appearance of priests in these novels is not in itself particularly surprising – given the Church's central role in the Spanish social fabric, the priest is a common figure in modern Spanish literature. Furthermore, because of his unique ability to crisscross social borders, especially those of class and gender, the figure of the priest has long offered writers the opportunity to scrutinize these borders and their limitations. A number of recent studies, such as those by Ricardo Krauel and Maryellen Bieder, have drawn attention to the way that literary priests such as Fermín (La Regenta), Julián (Los pazos de Ulloa), Gil Lastra (La fe), and even Serafín, a minor character in Una cristiana, can function as a bodily site for exploring anxieties about gender and social change (Bieder), or as a means of testing out new ways of writing gender identities (Krauel). My contention is that Pardo Bazán, Galdós, and Casanova likewise employ the paradoxical figure of the Moorish priest as a means of entry into the debates arising from the tension between Spain's culturally and racially hybrid past and increasingly ethnocentric present. This is particularly germane if we take into account recent research into the question of Spanish missionaries in Africa, which

shows that the role of the Church in the colonizing process and related discourse was very much in the public eye when Pardo Bazán, Galdós, and Casanova were writing their novels, as Azucena Pedraz Marcos shows in her detailed study Quimeras de Africa. The foundation of the Sociedad de Africanistas in December 1883 by modernizing politicians affiliated with the Institución Libre de Enseñanza coincided with the departure of the Congregation of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Claretians) to set up a mission in the Gulf of Guinea (Tofiño 131-2). Spain's colonial relationship with Africa was thus inevitably shaped by the need to resolve, or at least circumvent, the ongoing conflict between Spain's Islamic past and Catholic present. While traditionalist ideologues such as Menéndez y Pelayo and, later, Menéndez Pidal, sought to reduce the Islamic period of Spain's history to a parenthesis in a teleological Catholic narrative (Tofiño 129), some saw the value of a shared history as a tool in the colonizing struggle. Justification for the colonizing mission itself was found in the deathbed request of Isabel La Católica to her heirs, asking them to continue with the conquest of Africa, with the help of the Church (Balfour, Deadly Embrace: 10-11, Pedraz Marcos 31). The effect was to inscribe the Church as a colonial agent, as ideologues began to talk about "Spain's African vocation," a concept that, as Gustau Nerín shows, was to be central to the Francoist discourse of the 1940s (11). As Tofiño puts it, paraphrasing Nerín, "Spain wanted both to exploit its Islamic past (in the image of an innate African vocation) and to efface it (in the image of the Christian nation and its missionary ambitions)" (130). It is this paradox that comes under examination, in different and perhaps surprising ways, in Una cristiana, Nazarín, and Lo eterno.

Emilia Pardo Bazán's Una cristiana (1890), has received comparatively little critical attention, being generally considered one of the Condesa's less interesting works (e.g. Hemingway). It has been read primarily for its exploration of spirituality (Hyland, López-Sanz) or for its seeming anti-Semitism (Bauer, Dendle). Few scholars have commented on the (relatively minor) figure of Silvestre Moreno, and almost none on his identification with Morocco. My readings of both the novel and the character take account of work by feminist scholars who, since the early 1990s, have sought to demonstrate the feminist diversity behind Said's apparently totalizing concept of Orientalism through drawing texts by Western women into the debate (Kahf, Lewis, McClintock, Mills, Yeğenoğlu). Much Western feminist scholarship has argued that although Western women employed similar rhetorical strategies to their male contemporaries, their version of Orientalism is less pejorative, an argument that is grounded on a sense of shared oppression between women and colonial subjects (Lewis, Mills, critiqued in Yeğenoğlu 69). The question that this raises, of course, is how – if these women are simply reproducing the dominant discourse – a female version of Orientalism might be authorized (Yeğenoğlu 72). In the case of Una cristiana, we might reframe this question in the following way: if we agree that the novel has a gendered perspective, as critics have argued, is this perspective alone enough for the novel to transcend the dominant discourse about race and colonialism? Or does it simply reproduce it, and thus lay Pardo Bazán open to accusations of complicity in the colonialist oppression of Spain's African subjects and especially African women?

Our priest, Silvestre Moreno, is a secondary character in the novel, which is the story of the Galician engineering student Salustio Meléndez and his love for his uncle's young fiancée Carmiña, the "Christian woman" of the title. Moreno, who is an old friend of

Carmiña's family, acts as her spiritual adviser, and it is on his way to her wedding that we – along with Salustio, the narrator – first meet him. Through the interaction between Salustio and Moreno, as well as through Moreno's own account of his activities in Morocco, Pardo Bazán invites the reader to examine their own assumptions about cultural constructions of racial difference. This is made clear from the opening section of the novel, set in Madrid, in which Pardo Bazán sets up the questions that will condition our reading of the story Salustio is going to tell us. Salustio acts as the reader's eyes within the novel, and his is the perspective with which we are invited to identify. Fascinated by difference, Salustio – in his observations of the Madrid boarding houses where he lives as a student – draws on the ethnographic discourses popular at the time. In each of these boarding houses, he finds himself living with what we might nowadays call ethnic minority students: first the “mulato” Botello (10), and then the Cuban Trinidad (20, 27). Salustio's treatment of his housemates is rather boorish: he makes assumptions about each of them based on their racial appearance, and refuses to take into account any evidence to the contrary. Salustio and his friends consider Botello the genuine personification of an artist (10), taunting him with the name Dumillas, after the author Alexandre Dumas, who was also of mixed race. As Salustio admits, however, there is no justification for this as he has never seen any evidence that Botello has any artistic leanings at all: it is simply that his exotic appearance and his “misteriosa nobleza” (11) – not to mention his abject poverty and propensity for scabbing off others – lead them to assume it is so. The irony, of course, is that Salustio himself is of uncertain ethnic origin, with Portuguese and Jewish blood, and suffered as a schoolboy from the insult “Cardoso, Cardoso, judío tramposo” (29).

Salustio's first meeting with Moreno provides a clear illustration of his polarized way of thinking and his need to categorize what he sees, which is profoundly influenced by literary and cultural models. It is the first time he has seen a monk in the flesh, and his preconceptions, gleaned from literature and art, lead him to scrutinize the distant figure in the hope of identifying which "category" of monk he falls into:

Por primera vez de mi vida veía yo un fraile en carne y hueso. Me admiré como si creyese que los frailes ya no podían encontrarse más que en los lienzos de Zurbarán. De pinturas del Museo y la Academia; de haber visto a Rafael Calvo, una tarde, representar el drama del duque de Rivas Don Álvaro o la fuerza del sino, se derivaban todos mis conocimientos en indumentaria frailesca (...) De los frailes tenía yo dos ideas muy antitéticas que, sin embargo, coexistían en mi espíritu: por un lado el fraile de cromo de Ortego, picaresco, glotón, lascivo, beodo, "hombre sin vergüenza asomado a una ventana de paño" por otro el fraile de las novelas y los poemas, tétrico, exaltado, visionario, con la mente enflaquecida por el ayuno y los nervios desequilibrados por la continencia, huyendo de las mujeres, evitando a los hombres, lleno de flato, de tentaciones y de escrúpulos. Y quería saber a qué sección de estas dos pertenecía el caminante (62-63).

The point, of course, is that Moreno belongs to neither category: he is designed, from his first appearance in the novel, to explode preconceptions – both Salustio's and ours. The explicit signposts in the novel encourage a particular, very positive reading of Moreno. In

contrast with other literary priests such as his colleague Seraffín, or – as we shall see later – Nazarín, he is presented as unequivocally masculine, utterly engaging, and very much part of the real world. His story reflects the ideal of Spanish-Moroccan brotherhood underpinning the colonialist project: he declares that he is more at home in Morocco than in Spain, tells fascinating stories about his journeys around the country armed with nothing but a mule, and even describes himself as “medio moro” (69). His name, which has been much remarked on by critics, seems to support this reading – “Silvestre” suggesting something woody, an uncultivated plant, and “Moreno,” meaning “dark” or “brown”. Something that critics have not commented on, and which may not be accidental in the light of Pardo Bazán’s documented interest in geology,² is that “Silvestre Moreno” is also a type of granite indigenous to Galicia, which is recognizable by its pale color flecked with black. This offers us a hint as to how to read Moreno’s character: not only is he, like the granite, rock solid, both in physique and in character, but in his racial identification, he is also a curious mixture of black and white, and as such, in his very essence he challenges Salustio’s (and the reader’s?) polarized world view.

In keeping with this reading of Moreno, it is true that he appears on first sight to interrogate the different values that lie beyond the homogenizing idea of “moro,” drawing a distinction between the cultural identity of Moorishness and the Islamic faith. He even claims that he himself has “been” a Moor: “Moro, ya lo fui (...) Es decir (...) ya supondrán ustedes que no me hice mahometano, ni yo digo mahometano, esto es, sectario de Mahoma, sino moro, que significa hijo del África; mauritano” (95). The possibility admitted by his opening words, that it is feasible to be both a Spaniard and a “moro,” is precisely the possibility that so exercised both contemporary Orientalist and Catholic thinkers, albeit for

different reasons (Jubran 45, Tofiño 129): significantly, it was not until 1992 that the DRAE recognized Spanish Muslims in its definition of “moro”.³ In this light, Moreno’s separation of the cultural and religious connotations of “moro” might be seen as strategic, enabling the concept of a Moroccan-Spanish brotherhood untouched by inconvenient spiritual differences. Furthermore, it soon becomes apparent that Moreno’s experience is not one of genuine assimilation, but of playacting: the “Moorishness” to which he refers is an identity to be taken or left, and it is constructed almost entirely from stereotypes. This becomes painfully clear as Moreno tells his story of “becoming” a Moor, which takes place on his return to Spain from Africa after the 1868 Revolution, when the prevailing climate of anticlericalism meant that he was safer disguised as a Moor than in his religious habit (95-6). However, his Moorish appearance, far from drawing on any supposedly authentic Spanish-Moroccan similarity, is entirely constructed – and by the ladies of the British Consulate in Tangiers, no less, who help him to find the clothes and put together his outfit (96). In other words, he returns to Spain as the physical embodiment of a western, female ideal of a Moroccan man. In this disguise, and – significantly – in Granada, he encounters a group of holidaying Spaniards, to whom he presents himself as a Moroccan called, ironically, Aben Yusuf (“son of Joseph”). The encounter serves to allow Moreno – and Pardo Bazán – to expose the hypocrisy of the liberal bourgeoisie as these Spaniards – “más liberales que Riego” (100) – question “Aben Yusuf” about Moroccan women. The Spaniards are fascinated by the supposed immorality of the Moors, and especially the idea of polygamy, and deeply disappointed when “Aben Yusuf” reveals that far from having many wives, he is in fact unmarried (99-100). This episode seems to critique polarizing Orientalist ideas about the relationship between Spain and the Orient; Moreno overhears

one of his Spanish acquaintances remarking to another that he is a perfect example of the Moorish race (98), and his response is to play up to the stereotype, acting as he imagines a Moroccan would on returning to Granada, complete with dramatic sighs and longing looks.

The climax of the story, then, is something of a shock, as Moreno turns the tables on his interlocutors to insist on the need to protect the Church from the threat posed by Liberalism. This makes it impossible to forget that Moreno is a representative of the Church and thus an agent of the colonial project. The masculinity that so surprises Salustio in a priest is perhaps less surprising in one who is effectively a soldier of the Cross. In this context, Moreno's account of his journey into the desert, which initially seems such a charming tale of adventure, takes on an unsettling undertone as we realize his purpose in undertaking the journey, and wonder just how much brotherhood was really involved. In fact, read with a more cynical modern eye, it becomes clear that Moreno's relationship with the Moroccans is not based on brotherhood at all, but on the paternalistic position of the colonialist occupier towards his native charges. He cheerfully admits that despite his claims of integration, he has not really bothered to learn the language properly (94-95), and that his affection for the Moroccans is based largely on their unquestioning respect for him: "Si allí me hallo más a gusto, es que aquella pobre gente se desvive por uno y le manifiesta gran respeto (...) Para aquellos infelices es una recomendación el hábito. Nos llaman, en su idioma, santos y sabios..." (94-95).

The question that this raises, of course, is how far we might read Una cristiana as condoning the worldview expressed by Moreno and how far it critiques it. Reading from a modern perspective, and particularly from a modern feminist perspective, it is tempting to argue that the novel unambiguously unmasks the colonialist strategies he employs and

critiques the rhetoric of African vocation of which he is a bodily representative. I would argue, however, that this is not the case, and that one episode in particular highlights the relative nature of the novel's feminist critique. Moreno's position as a priest allows him the privilege normally accorded only to Western women, of entering the harem of a Moroccan friend. In his account of this experience, he employs almost the full gamut of Orientalizing stereotypes to describe the Moroccan women he encounters there. Illustrating what Said calls "the citationary nature of Orientalism" (176-77), he depicts the "mora favorita" in terms of a character in Cervantes's "novela del Cautivo" (70). Moreno's position as a priest does not prevent him from gazing long and hard at the Moroccan woman's body, and he justifies this, when Salustio asks him to describe Carmiña in the same terms, by drawing an impermeable boundary between Moroccan and Christian women. The effect is to reduce the former to a soulless body and the latter to a disembodied soul:

Caballero, usted le ha de perdonar a un pobre fraile que se exprese como lo manda el hábito que viste y la regla a que obedece. De una mora, de una infiel, yo puedo describir el cuerpo, porque si Dios se lo ha concedido hermoso, será lo único que se pueda alabar en ella, ya que el alma está envuelta en las tinieblas del error (...) De una cristiana, lo primero y acaso lo único que merece ensalzarse es el alma, y en mi boca sonarían mal otros elogios (71).

Moreno is such an engaging character that we, like Salustio, are drawn into his anecdotes. It initially seems that his function is to challenge the polarized thinking exemplified by Salustio – not to mention the reader – and thus the easy stereotyping and

hypocrisy that dominate Spanish representations of Morocco. The figure of Moreno can be read positively in terms of the granite for which he is named, as the rock solid, moral backbone of the novel, and a bodily site of racial unity. In the light of Moreno's role as an agent of the Church and a spokesman for traditional Spain, however, another reading of the priest and his granitic namesake emerges: the solidity of granite is also immutable, impervious to change. The black and white elements of the rock are held in eternal suspension, black particles dispersed against a white background, always separate, never mingling. That is, a visual and tactile representation of the inadequacy of the rhetoric of Spanish-Moroccan brotherhood. Moreno is thus not a hybrid, Moorish priest like Nazarín and Juan, but a willing agent of the Church and a soldier at the service of Spain's colonial project. The more we learn about Moreno, the clearer it becomes that far from exploding myths about Moroccan difference, he in fact embodies the discourse of Spain's so-called "African vocation", providing corporeal evidence of the contemporary mobilization of Spain's multicultural history to justify Spanish expansion in Africa.

Five years after *Una cristiana*, Pardo Bazán's friend and contemporary Pérez Galdós was also to write about a Moorish priest, but unlike Moreno, Nazarín – the protagonist of Galdós's eponymous 1895 novel – really does have Moorish blood. Like his predecessor, however, he is presented to us through the mediation of a narrator whose perspective we are constantly encouraged to question. The novel begins with the narrator's account of his initial meeting with Nazarín, which is then followed by the tale of Nazarín's departure from Madrid, his wanderings and adventures in the surrounding countryside, and finally his return to the city as a prisoner. It is not uncommon for critics to read the novel either as a

spiritual allegory or a literary pastiche, and Nazarín, with his “quixotic attempt to live out the scriptures” as an echo of Christ or Don Quixote (Labanyi, Gender 397, see also Gillespie, Parker). Many critics, too, have focused on the irony of the novel, and its deconstruction of narratorial authority (Bly, Urey). More recent studies have pointed to the novel’s concern with deviance and marginality (Labanyi, “Representing”; Tsuchiya). Almost the only scholar seriously to address Nazarín’s racial identity is Mary Lee Bretz, who reads Nazarín alongside representations of Arab-African characters in other works by Galdós, to argue that Galdós uses these characters to express his “opposition to official state policy regarding Morocco” (230) – that is, to the policy of commercial and military expansion southwards across the straits (Balfour, End; Deadly Embrace). I would contend, however, that the significance of Nazarín lies more in its interrogation of the discursive structures underpinning the Spanish relationship with Morocco than in its critique of any given policy. I read the novel as a complex critique of the contemporary Spanish fascination with the Orient and the problems arising from the Spanish desire to employ established Anglo-European rhetorical strategies to portray that fascination.

Nazarín is structured around Nazarín’s encounters with others, all of which are shaped by the desire of these others to pin down, define, or describe him. The first of these encounters, which Peter Bly calls “a lesson in reading strategies” (9), is the narrator’s own description of his reaction, and that of his journalist friend, to their first meeting with Nazarín. As Bly remarks, we are given many details that highlight Nazarín’s ambiguous appearance, including his age, dress, profession, and even his position in the boarding house-cum-brothel where they first meet him (17). The famous first description of Nazarín also calls into question his gender – as the narrator watches, “apareció una figura, que al

pronto me pareció de mujer. Era un hombre. La voz, más que el rostro, nos lo declaró” (14).

While this is consonant with Kraal’s theory of a historical connection between gender ambiguity and the ministry that offers the possibility to challenge restrictive gender roles, the question is not pursued in the rest of the novel, unlike the question of Nazarín’s ambiguous racial identity. In fact, the narrator and his friend are from the start far more intrigued by Nazarín’s racial identity, which the narrator does not initially see as ambiguous, describing the priest as: “el tipo semítico más perfecto que fuera de la Morería he visto: un castizo árabe sin barbas” (14).

In this light, the initial, feminized description of Nazarín might be linked with the conventional feminization of the Oriental man that has been a focus of attention for critics from Said onwards. Once the narrator learns (from his friend) that Nazarín is in fact Spanish, he adjusts his response. We hear no more about Nazarín’s ambiguous gender, and the narrator refers to him throughout the first section of the novel by a variety of epithets that highlight the dual elements of his appearance: he is “El clérigo semítico” (14); “el clérigo árabe” (16; 32); “el sacerdote árabe y manchego” (17), and “este clérigo musulmánico-manchego” (30). The narrator’s preference for the use of these increasingly complex epithets over Nazarín’s own name has the effect of depersonalizing him and reducing him to the sum of these parts. Furthermore, it directs the reader’s attention both to the desire to categorize and the difficulty of categorization: for the narrator and his friend, Nazarín is characterized by his essential “unknowableness.” On their first encounter with Nazarín, the narrator describes how he questions his friend, who has heard of the priest before: “Pedíle antecedentes del para mí extrañísimo e incomprensible Nazarín, en quien a cada momento se me acentuaba más el tipo musulmán” (17). The journalist’s response similarly

juxtaposes absolute certainty about Nazarín's ethnic identity with an admission of ignorance about anything other than the most basic identifying details: "Este es un árabe manchego (...) No sé de él más que el nombre y la patria" (17). Even these details, we soon learn, are not certain. At the end of Part I, as the narrator is preparing to begin telling Nazarín's story, he emphasizes once again his uncertainty about every aspect of Nazarín, bar his ethnic identity: "no me atrevo aún a opinar categóricamente sobre el sujeto que acabamos de ver, y que sigue pareciéndome tan árabe como en el primer instante, aunque de su partida de bautismo resulte (...) moro manchego" (28). While the reporter disagrees strongly about how to interpret Nazarín's actions, he agrees about the priest's essentially unknowable character, which he sees as an absence, or negation: "yo defino el carácter de ese hombre diciendo que es la ausencia de todo carácter y la negación de la personalidad humana" (29).

The novel's introductory section ends, as many critics have pointed out (e.g. Bly), with the narrator's own doubts about the story he is about to tell, which highlight the constructed nature of the story and of the character of Nazarín: "¿Concluí por construir un Nazarín de nueva planta con materiales extraídos de mis propias ideas, o llegué a posesionarme intelectualmente del verdadero y real personaje?" (33). Although they seem opposed, both aspects of the narrator's uncertainty – has he created a "new Nazarín" out of his own ideas, or has he achieved "intellectual possession" of an "authentic character" that exists to be possessed? – reflect one of the central propositions of Orientalist theory: that there existed, from the end of the eighteenth century, a discourse of "Orientalism" that enabled the West to "know", that is, to dominate, restructure, and have authority over the Orient (Said 3). This discourse was famously constructed on the concept of a binary

distinction between West and East, and studies of it, as we saw in the introduction to this essay, equally famously, make little reference to Spain, whose position between West and East challenges that binary distinction at so many levels. My contention is that the first section of the novel, Bly's "lesson in reading strategies" (9), engages directly with the incongruence between dominant nineteenth-century Western discourses of Orient and the Spanish experience, relating the frustrated desire for knowledge of the text with the equally frustrated desire for knowledge of the Other. That is, it foregrounds questions not only – as many critics have argued – about text and reader, the reliability of the narrator and "the words that he writes on the blank page and which constitute the text" (Bly 24), but also – through the narrator's response to and representation of Nazarín – about the nature of the encounter between Spanish Self and apparently unknowable other.

If the first part of the novel raises the issues in play, Nazarín's encounter during his travels with the apparently deranged nobleman Don Pedro Belmonte shows one aspect of them at work. Scholars have tended to read this passage primarily from a moral-religious perspective – for example, Bly sees Belmont's function as "a forceful sounding board and prompter for Nazarín's statements on socio-religious problems and the identity of the world leader who will solve them" (41-42), while Bretz argues that it shows Galdós exploring "a different form of spirituality that reconnects with early Christianity and with Oriental, non-European traditions" (231). At the same time, I would argue, this encounter also develops the novel's critique of Spanish responses to the Orient. Where the narrator's response to Nazarín is characterized by uncertainty, Don Pedro is perfectly sure both of Nazarín's true identity and of his own "intellectual possession" – to use the narrator's terms

– of that truth (33). He claims not only that he can instantly recognize Nazarín as an Arab, but also that he knows his entire story:

Usted es árabe de nacimiento (...) Árabe legítimo. Al dedillo me sé su historia. Nació usted en un país hermosísimo, donde dicen que estuvo el Paraíso terrenal, entre el Tigris y el Eufrates, en el territorio de Aldjezira, que también llaman la Mesopotamia (...) ¡Si lo sé, si lo sé todo! Y el nombre arábigo de usted es Esrou-Esdras... (114)

There is no hint, in Don Pedro's response to Nazarín, of the duality that so troubled the narrator, reflected in those double-barreled epithets. In fact, he easily solves the "problem" of the disjunction between Nazarín's vocation and his appearance by separating the religious and racial aspects of his identity, rather as Moreno does in *Una cristiana*. He accepts that Nazarín is, as he puts it, "cristiano de religión", but informs him that, nevertheless, "eso no quita que seas de pura raza arábigo" (101). Don Pedro thus functions in the text as an agent of Western Orientalist discourse. Like the Orientalists described by Said, he claims to "know" the Orient, which he describes in exoticizing, literary terms. "Eres árabe," he tells Nazarín, "y de Oriente, del poético, del sublime Oriente" (102). For Don Pedro, the Orient, reflected in the person of Nazarín, is mysterious or even deliberately self-concealing, reflecting the conventional representation of the Orient as what Yeğenoğlu terms "nothing but an endless dissemblance and dissimulation" (49-50). Faced with such uncertainty, Don Pedro insists ever more on Nazarín's deliberate provocation and his own knowledge of "the truth" that Nazarín is not a humble priest, but the Patriarch of the

Armenian Church: “¡Pero si es inútil el disimulo, señor mío! Usted... (...) Perdóneme si le descubro (...) ¡si lo sé todo! (...) ¡Sí, no vale negarlo, ni obstinarse en el disimulo, que respeto!” (113-4, italics mine). In response, and on one of very few occasions on which we hear him speak of himself, Nazarín attempts to disabuse Don Pedro, telling him that “yo no soy árabe, ni obispo, ni patriarca, ni me llamo Esdras, ni soy de la Mesopotamia, sino de Miguelturra, y mi nombre es Nazario Zaharín” (116). Nevertheless, the nobleman persists in his belief, and Nazarín’s frustration, when he recounts the story to his companions Ándara and Beatriz, is apparent: “Salió con la tecla de que yo soy obispo, más, patriarca, y de que nací en Aldjezira (...) Y nada me valía negarlo y manifestarle la verdad” (120). Don Pedro’s assumption of an unambiguously Orientalist position forces Nazarín into the position of the silenced, enigmatic Oriental, reflecting Said’s contention that “because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action” (3). However, the reader is aware throughout the episode that Nazarín is not what Don Pedro believes him to be – although without necessarily having any more authoritative knowledge of Nazarín’s true identity. Indeed, the reader has even been encouraged by the narrator to doubt the very existence of such a true identity.

We might read Nazarín’s encounters with the narrator and with Don Pedro as a meditation on the desirability – or even the possibility – of applying the discourses of Anglo-European Orientalism to the Spanish situation. The indigenous Spanish response, however, provides no alternative, as we see in a pivotal scene towards the end of the novel. In this scene, many elements of Nazarín’s encounter with Don Pedro are echoed by his encounter with a mob of villagers, their alcalde and a pair of guardias civiles, who pursue the priest and his companions to a ruined castle above the town. This encounter ironically

punctures the image assumed by both the narrator and Don Pedro of Nazarín as enigmatic Oriental. The villagers too believe themselves to be familiar with Nazarín and his story, but where Don Pedro referred to him with the culto term “árabe”, they prefer the more popular “moro”. Their “reading” of him has strong echoes of the Spanish popular ballad, as they create a story around “el moro Muza” that swiftly takes on more and more exotic elements. First, he is simply “ese morito”, then “su reverencia morisca”, a “Príncipe moro”, and ultimately, a “príncipe moro desterrado” (157-8). The villagers, like Don Pedro before them, have a strong desire for Nazarín to fit into their preconceived idea of the “other”. This desire, as Tsuchiya has noted, is not limited to the racial other: “in spite of the disagreement and ambiguity surrounding Nazarín’s character, all those who define him, either positively or negatively” – except, of course, for the narrator – “characterize him in terms of monolithic stereotypes” (201).

The stereotyping that Tsuchiya attributes to “society’s desire to impose order, discipline, and (economic) utility on that which is associated with disorder” (201) seems, in the case of Nazarín’s racial identity, to reinforce the conservative, homogenizing view of Spanishness endorsed by thinkers such as Menéndez Pelayo. While liberal anthropologists proposed theories of racial hybridity (Jubran 80-83), imagining Spaniards as a “racial alloy” (Goode), conservative intellectuals saw Spain’s Moorish past as something to be repressed or even amputated, as in Menéndez Pelayo’s famous image of the Moors (and thus by extension North Africa) as the “miembro podrido de la nacionalidad española” (236). As Daniela Flesler points out, this image ironically reinforces the very argument Menéndez Pelayo is trying to challenge: “revela la dificultad de deshacerse de un otro cuando ese otro forma parte de los mismo, deshacerse de un cuerpo que es el mismo cuerpo” (83). In this

light, we can see that the *culto* discourse employed by Don Pedro and the popular discourse of the villagers coincide in their desire to establish Nazarín's essential "otherness" and thus, by extension, to repress – or "amputate" – the Oriental element of Spanishness that he embodies. That the reader is to critique rather than celebrate this desire is suggested by the Alcalde's flat rejection of Nazarín as exotic Other: "Tan moro es éste como mi abuelo" (158). The irony of this statement can hardly have been lost on readers familiar with the new theories of Spanish racial hybridity proposed by *institucionalista* anthropologists in the 1880s and early 1890s. In this light, we might consider that the function of Nazarín as racial hybrid is to expose the neutralizing strategies employed by those for whom any suggestion of ambiguity served only to hasten the breakdown of national borders in the face of what Elaine Showalter has called "the relentless specter of millennial change" (4).

If Nazarín and its eponymous hero hint at the anxieties provoked in *fin de siglo* Spain by the apparent breakdown of national borders – not to mention those of race, gender, and class – Sofía Casanova's novel Lo eterno, published twelve years later, confronts these anxieties head-on. In the years between the publication of Nazarín and that of Lo eterno, Spain had not only undergone the traumatic experience of 1898, but had also sought to recover wounded pride through renewed military involvement in North Africa. Casanova, newly returned to Madrid from nearly two decades in her adopted Poland, was able to observe events with a critical distance that is the central feature of her novel. Like Nazarín, its protagonist Padre Juan is a bodily example of the clash between the conservative desire for racial purity and *institucionalista* theories of racial hybridity. However, this aspect of the novel has rarely been acknowledged, as the limited critical

attention it has received has tended to fall in line with Casanova's own (largely unfounded) reputation as a right-wing conservative.⁴ Furthermore, its apparent adherence to the norms of romantic fiction has led those critics who have considered it to concur that it is a straight romance. A brief summary of the novel's plot seems to bear this out: it is the story of a reluctant priest (Andalusian/Moorish Juan) who falls in love with the poor but virtuous Consuelo and suffers a dramatic crisis of identity, but, in the end, selflessly plays the leading role in enabling Consuelo's marriage to the man she loves, before leaving Spain to work as a missionary in Africa. Carolyn Galerstein and Kathleen McNerney claim that despite Casanova's attempt at subtlety, the novel is basically conventional: "[a]lthough the temptation and salvation scenes are melodramatic, Casanova attempts a psychological study before invoking the martyrdom typical of the genre" (70). Janet Pérez is of the same opinion, suggesting that the novel "is tainted by melodrama and more than the required dose of plot complications [...] the conflict is resolved via the stereotypical device of martyrdom" (20). Ofelia Alayeto, too, argues that, "Lo eterno is a curious blend of novela rosa 'romance novel' and psychological study. In its parallel love stories involving Father Juan and Consuelo, it is full of clichés and heads towards the inevitable happy ending" (59). Not one of the small number of scholars who have written on the novel has mentioned Juan's ambiguous racial identity or commented on the implications of his final move to Africa.

It is certainly true that a first reading of the parallel stories of Juan's and Consuelo's struggles against the authority of the Church - in Juan's case because he is a reluctant priest, in Consuelo's simply because she is a Spanish woman - seems to show a conventional restoration of moral order, in Juan's final decision to go to Africa to become a

missionary and Consuelo's to marry her rich suitor. The novel thus appears to celebrate the Church's role as Spain's gatekeeper and arbiter of moral order and, ultimately, its part in the neo-Imperial project of the first decade of the 20th century. In this reading, Juan - like Moreno in Una cristiana - appears to become an agent of colonial (and patriarchal) power, while his Andalusian-Moorish blood, like Moreno's rhetoric of brotherhood, simply provides a justification for the imperial project. However, while Casanova clearly wants this reading to be available, beyond the narratives of victimization and resolution there are a variety of cues that suggest a radically different reading. First of all, Lo eterno is a much angrier and more overtly critical novel than either Una cristiana or Nazarín, which we can clearly see in the prologue to the first, 1907 edition of Lo eterno. This prologue forms a response to the anonymous editor of an unnamed weekly publication, who had rejected the manuscript of Lo eterno as "scandalous," asking Casanova if she had forgotten how to write for people "south of the Pyrenees."⁵ Indignantly – and not without a hint of alarm – she responds:

¿Será posible que mi expatriación me haya dado convicciones éticas y puntos de vista artísticos que difieren absolutamente de los de aquí?

¿Seré ya tan extranjera en mi patria que no perciba la pulsación de su vida psicológica, y que este drama de un alma – a la cual reverencio por su fuerza traspasada de sombra y su innata orientación al bien – escandalice a las gentes?

(5-6, italics Casanova's)

Casanova's anger reflects her dissatisfaction – expressed elsewhere in her work – with the limited and limiting narratives of nation that dominated fin de siglo literature. As in her other early works, from El doctor Wolski (1894) to El crimen de Beira-mar (1914), in Lo eterno, she deliberately pushes the boundaries of what was acceptable, although always with a pragmatic eye on the need to pay lip service, at least, to respectability. As a result, it is possible to trace an alternative reading of the novel that belies Casanova's claim in the prologue that this is simply a rather anodyne moral fable, as she uses her characters to enter into important public debates about the future of the modern nation.

Padre Juan is an Andalusian Moor. Like Nazarín (but unlike Moreno), he is a true racial hybrid, whose face “denotaba el tipo, tan frecuente aún en España, del moro andaluz que se formó de las almas de dos razas enemigas, cuando el amor creaba venturosas alianzas entre los cristianos y los sarracenos” (11). As such, he embodies the establishment fears about the breakdown of boundaries of gender, race, and class that were central to fin de siècle culture, not only in Spain but throughout Europe and the West. These fears are at the centre of Lo eterno, in which establishment anxieties about racial identity are conflated with the fear of hereditary transmission of physical and moral degeneration that Casanova had explored in detail in her earlier novel El doctor Wolski. Lo eterno explores the reactionary response to these fears as Juan is forced into the Church by his mother and her Bishop brother (16-17) in order to save him from the degenerative influence of his Moorish side, represented in the present day by his freethinker father (20). Juan's story thus explores the consequences of the Church's attempt to counter the “threat” of racial and moral degeneration through force. It traces his growing awareness that the Church is the primary agent in an oppressive, patriarchal society that exerts power through the

maintenance of firm boundaries between Self and Other, masculine and feminine, public and private.

The Church's control over Juan is symbolized, and the story of his struggle begins, when he is displaced from his native Andalusia and sent as a punishment to Madrid, to be chaplain to the Villabrizo family. Casanova's Madrid represents the dominant national ideology that sought to repress reminders of the nation's Moorish past, a clash that is symbolized by the location of the Villabrizo Palace on the edge of Madrid's old Moorish quarter. That is, the Villabrizo Palace represents conservative Spain, dogmatically Catholic but unable to distance itself from its Moorish antecedents. From the time of his arrival in Madrid, Juan's self-image as a priest begins to break down and he begins to struggle against the limitations that the Church imposes on him, wanting freedom of expression above all – to be “libre, libre, para decir a los hombres que vienen a mí cuanto siente mi corazón, sin trabas ni fórmulas” (22) His desire for Consuelo leads him to try to become “un hombre como los demás” (87), but the result of this is that he begins to treat Consuelo as the Church had treated him, taking upon himself the right to control her future, when he exploits his privileged position as a priest to intervene in her relationship with her suitor (89). Casanova explicitly links Juan's behavior with the influence of Madrid and the traditional, Church dominated society represented by the Villabrizo Palace, and unlike Pardo Bazán, she argues forcefully that the Church's dominance is inherently perilous to women. We see this most vividly in the passage where, as Consuelo enters the palace chapel, she loses all semblance of life and individuality: “Semejante a mortuoria aparición, vestida de negro y envuelta la cabeza en las ondas de un manto (...) en el sombrío y

silencioso fondo del confesonario una rígida silueta negra, parecía un cadaver en entreabierta tumba...” (76).

In bringing together Consuelo’s and Juan’s experiences in this way, the novel thus draws a parallel between the Church’s treatment of the racial Other (embodied by Juan) and its treatment of women. This critique is intensified, not diminished, by Juan’s move to Africa at the end of the novel, which has traditionally been read as evidence of his return to the Church and thus the restoration of moral order. If this is the case, of course, then as I argued earlier, Juan’s racial identity simply provides justification for a colonial project based on a rhetoric of Hispano-African brotherhood. If we look more closely at the way that Juan’s move to Africa is presented, however, a different story emerges. Juan’s final years are mediated to the reader only through the words of an unnamed priest, in whose account Juan is described as “un voluntario en el ejército del bien,” who goes into “las tierras salvajes de las que sacaba con persuasión y dulzura sobrehumanas, tribus enteras de indígenas que hoy [...] alaban al Dios único...” (117). The priest’s account of Juan’s death is florid and recalls conventional images of martyrdom: “[v]enía envuelto en algas olorosas; en su faz serena, sonriente, como de dichosa mortal que vislumbra cercano el cielo, no había la menor huella de sufrimiento” (118). Furthermore, we soon discover that the novel’s final chapter, and thus all the information we have about Juan’s time in Africa, are doubly mediated, as the priest’s letter is being read by Juan’s uncle, the Bishop who was responsible for forcing him into the Church in the first place. It is the Bishop who voices the novel’s final words, on which most existing readings have turned: “Bienaventurados los que luchan y vencen; los que llegan a la presencia de Dios ensangrentados los pies y las manos por las espinas y las piedras del angosto camino [...] Los fáciles senderos floridos no llevan

a la altura...” (118). In showing us the Bishop reading the letter and then allowing him to voice, in his own words, his reading of the moral of Juan’s story, Casanova unequivocally and literally depicts for us the officially sanctioned reading of her novel.

Leaving us with the Bishop’s interpretation is a clever move, because while it gives the appearance of a clear and unambiguous moral resolution, it also provides the key to what Susan Lanser calls “the articulation between surface and subtext, the syntactic hinge that binds and finally transforms the whole” (12). The shift from the 3rd-person narrator of the rest of the book, to a pair of voices representing the institution that is the very focus of the novel’s critique, in a speech dominated by imperialist rhetoric, serves principally to highlight the dissonance between the figure in the official Church account of Juan’s last years and the character we have got to know over the last hundred and twenty pages. Because we hear only one side of the story, we are simply left to choose whether or not to accept the official version. My contention is that Casanova deliberately exploits this dissonance as a strategy to question and destabilize the notion of “Spain’s African vocation” that forms the ideological basis for the renewed colonialist project, but without drawing excessive attention to her criticisms. Her choice of Africa as a destination enables this, because Africa functions as a “paradoxical space” (Rose), at once part and not part of the Spanish nation, which can thus be evoked in support of either reactionary or utopian arguments. As a result, a reader invested in the celebration of the dominant national discourse can read Juan’s journey to Africa as a sign of his commitment to the neo-colonial project and the realization of “Spain’s African Vocation”. At the same time, a reader for whom the novel’s key lies in its critique of the Church’s treatment of women and other minorities, can read Juan’s journey to Africa as an acknowledgement that the liberty he

desires is simply unattainable within the inescapably gendered and castizo borders of Catholic Spain.

In conclusion, the figure of the racially ambiguous priest does indeed function, in Una cristiana, Nazarín, and Lo eterno, as a bodily site for exploring the anxieties arising from the conflict between Spain's racially heterogeneous past and increasingly ethnocentric present. Looking with fresh eyes at these texts by Pardo Bazán, Galdós and Casanova reveals a range of responses to the Church's role in the neocolonial project in the second half of the "long" nineteenth century. Furthermore, it exposes the complexity of Spain's relationship with notions of the exotic and the inadequacy of attempts to co-opt the established rhetoric of contemporary Anglo-European Orientalist and Colonialist discourse to describe the Spanish experience – not only for Pardo Bazán, Galdós, and Casanova in the late nineteenth century, but also for us at the start of the twenty-first.

NOTES

1. Earlier versions of the arguments outlined in this essay were presented at the Women in Spanish and Portuguese Studies annual conference (Liverpool, 2003) and at the Kentucky Foreign Languages Conference (Lexington, 2004). I am grateful to Kathy Bacon and Stuart Davies for their invaluable discussions on aspects of those earlier versions.

2. Pardo Bazán was a great friend of the Spanish geologist José Macpherson y Hemas (1839-1902), whom she met through their mutual involvement in the Institución Libre de Enseñanza. According to José Luis Barrera, the Condesa hosted Macpherson while he was researching his study, “Apuntes petrográficos de Galicia”, published in 1881.

3. The 1869 version of the DRAE gives the following definition: “MORO: El natural de una parte del África Septentrional frontera a España, donde estaba la antigua provincia de la Mauritania. Úsase también como sustantivo // Lo que pertenece a estos naturales // Por extensión, el natural de otras regiones donde se sigue la secta de Mahoma; y así se llaman MOROS los mahometanos de nuestras provincias de Asia” (DRAE 1869). In 1992, for the first time, the definition was expanded to include the following: “MORO: ... // ... // Por extensión, que profesa la religión islámica // Dícese del musulmán que habitó en España desde el siglo VIII hasta el XV // Pertenciente o relativo a la España musulmana de aquel tiempo // Dícese del musulmán de Mindanao y de otras islas de Malasia” (DRAE 1992).

4. Casanova has been remembered in this way largely thanks to the many obituaries published in the Francoist press on her death in 1958, which were for many years the

only source of information about her. Recent scholarship, however, tells a different story. For a detailed biographical study, see Rosario Martínez, Sofía Casanova. Mito y literatura (Santiago: Xunta de Galicia, 1999). For a detailed study of Casanova's work that outlines her early radicalism, see Kirsty Hooper, Extranjera en mi patria. Gender and the Modern Nation in Sofía Casanova's Early Narrative (1894-1914), forthcoming.

5. The most likely publication is El Cuento Semanal, founded in 1907, the first of the novela corta collections that proliferated in the first decades of the twentieth century. The founder and editor of El Cuento Semanal was Eduardo Zamacois. Casanova would publish her novela corta, Princesa del amor hermoso in the collection two years later. Lo eterno itself would of course be published, in a slightly altered version, by La Novela Corta in 1920.

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