After the devastation of the Napoleonic Wars (1808–1814), the Carlist Wars (1833–1876), and the progressive loss of the American colonies, Spain struggled to regain a sense of social stability and to regenerate its fractured identity. With the emergence of liberalism as a political option during the early 1800s, the nation looked forward to an era full of promise and new beginnings. Throughout the following decades, unprecedented social and political reforms were implemented, including the right to vote, the right to attend political gatherings, freedom of religion, and the right to receive a secular education. These rights, however, were limited to men, a fact that did not go unnoticed by progressive female thinkers of the time such as Emilia Pardo Bazán. In an essay entitled “La mujer española” (1889), Pardo Bazán insists that women should not be excluded from the transformations that Spain was undergoing and calls attention to the growing disconnect between men and women as a result of this exclusion: “[C]ada nueva conquista del hombre en el terreno de las libertades políticas ahonda el abismo moral que le separa de la mujer” (89). Despite the fact that Spanish society was experiencing a radical—albeit erratic and often interrupted—process of modernization, the social role of women remained stagnant: “Para el español,” Pardo Bazán declares, “todo puede y debe transformarse; sólo la mujer ha de mantenerse inmutable y fija . . . la mujer es tal como la hace y quiere el hombre” (88, 103). To a large degree, women were excluded from the social benefits of liberalism and remained in their traditional role, that of ángeles del hogar, of pure and passive caretakers of the home and family.1

Although women were limited to the space of the patriarchal hogar, the social importance of marriage transcended this private realm, for it often played a central institutional role as a symbolic model for the order and structure of the modern nation-state. Legitimate unions were promoted in the hope of reconfiguring Spain’s national identity and regaining a rapidly eroding sense of social and cultural coherence and order. Woman’s role as wife and mother was of the

1 In “La educación del hombre y la de la mujer” (1892), Pardo Bazán further expounds on the submissiveness that was expected of nineteenth-century Spanish women as she states that “el eje de la vida femenina . . . no es la dignidad y felicidad propia, sino la ajena del esposo e hijos, y si no hay hijos ni esposo, la del padre y del hermano, y cuando estos faltaren, la de la entidad abstracta género masculino” (152).
utmost importance during this time of national and cultural regeneration, as a
direct link was established between familial stability and social order and coher-
ence. Nineteenth-century Spanish women were valorized primarily for their
“reproductive potential,” but they were also held responsible for “exerting a
civilizing influence upon the members of the family” (Aldaraca 66, 76). Indeed,
a direct correlation was often made between women and civilization, mostly by
male authors. One nineteenth-century historian, Antonio Pareja Serrada, com-
pares women to a “locomo´ vil,” an important symbol of modernization in the
nineteenth century, that propels men toward “la civilización y el adelanto” (125).
Pareja Serrada goes on to warn of the devastating consequences of not
allowing women to fulfill their civilizing duty: “De la civilización a la barbarie
sólo existe un paso, que cierra el levadizo puente de la instrucción de la mujer:
dejad caer ese puente y los bárbaros rugirán” (214). He argues that women are
the key to the nation’s civilized future and should be therefore respected and
valued as such.

Like the institution of marriage, the city became an important model for the
formation of the new Spanish society and played a pivotal role in the reconfigu-
ration of the nation amidst the social and political turmoil of the nineteenth
century. “Civilized” urban spaces were glorified as the representation of the
hope for national prosperity while spaces of “barbarism” (often the untamed
countryside) were denounced as hindrances to the project of national progress
and modernity. The city, most notably Madrid, was lauded as the source of
Spain’s future advancement and progress. As Ángel Bahamonde and Luis Otero
Carvajal have argued, nineteenth-century Madrid became “un núcleo cuyo pal-
pitar propio transciende la esfera local, proyectándose a toda la formación
española” (15), a statement that echoes nineteenth-century author Ramón Me-
sonero Romanos’s contention that the capital was a “termómetro seguro para
conocer el grado de civilización de cada pueblo” (7). Mesonero Romanos him-
self declared that the city of Madrid should embody the political and social
values of modern Spain. He suggested changing the names of the city’s streets
from vacant words such as “Arrastra,” “Noramela vayas,” and “Buena Vista”
to names that represented not only “españoles célebres,” such as Cervantes and
Quevedo, but also “las víctimas del 2 de mayo” whose blood was shed on the
streets of Madrid as they fought for “la independencia social” (30). It is signifi-
cant that it is the capital city, the center of Spanish “civilization,” that was chosen
to remind the occasional passerby of Spain’s renewed identity as a liberal nation.

Other Spanish cities, such as Santiago de Compostela, an urban setting com-

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Christine Arkinstall offers an interesting counterpoint to this male perspective as she
discusses how processes of nation-building and history writing in nineteenth- and twentieth-
century Spain were treated by female artists and intellectuals such as Rosario de Acuña,
Ángela Figuera, and Rosa Chacel. As she argues in the introduction to her study, Emilia
Pardo Bazán could be added to this group of writers who challenged male-centered concep-
tions of society, politics, and history in modern and contemporary Spain (17).

In his study of the connections between space and literature in nineteenth-century
Europe, Franco Moretti also comments on the glorification of urban spaces: “[T]he
great city is truly another world compared to the rest of the country”; it is constructed as “the
natural goal of all young men of talent” (64).
monly featured in Pardo Bazán’s works, were also seen as centers of civilization and progress in the nineteenth century. Just as women played a central role in their marriages as agents of social advancement and stability, so did they become the face of civilization in cities like Santiago. A nineteenth-century British visitor, Catherine Gasquoine Hartley, suggests this intersection between the civilizing female and the modern city when she describes Santiago as a unique and charming place whose beautiful landscape is only upstaged by its magnificent women. In this city that has “a vein of rich civilization in its blood,” that glorifies intellect and stands for “art and the beauty of life,” it is the women who are firmly established as the main attraction (297). They “walk like priestesses” and possess an extraordinary beauty, grace, and elegance—all characteristics that serve to “impress the stranger” more than any of the city’s other features (299). She goes on to describe in detail the modern advancements one can find in Santiago, such as electric lights, railroads, and motorcars, and compliments the city on its ability to implement these changes while still maintaining its unique charm. As Gasquoine Hartley confirms with her description of Santiago, women were indeed inextricably bound up with civilization and progress in nineteenth-century Spain.

The organization of social spaces and the institutional importance of marriage in the nineteenth century were not only prominent topics of social, political, and cultural debate, but also provided the subject matter for popular literary works such as Benito Pérez Galdós’s Fortunata y Jacinta (1887), Leopoldo Alas’s La Regenta (1884–85), and Pardo Bazán’s Los pazos de Ulloa (1886). Of course, these novels provided entertainment for the emerging bourgeoisie, but they were also a suitable means to expose people to matters of social and political importance. Oftentimes, they could become the vehicle of subversive meanings, emphasizing elements and ideas that fall outside the bounds of the legislations crafted by politicians and other government leaders. In this essay, I set out to explore the subversive social potential of Los pazos de Ulloa by analyzing the connection between marriage and space in this work. Although marriage was an effective strategy of social and subjective control in nineteenth-century Spain, it is my contention that this institution also provided the grounds for subversive intervention—for undermining the basic tenets of patriarchal society and the modern nation-state. In particular, I set out to prove that the intersection between marriage and social space can be unmoored from the interlocking regulations of domestic and political legislation and recast as a destabilizing force within the society it is supposed to uphold. I interpret marriage as a liminal construct whose meaning fluctuates as it alternates between the “civilized” locus of the city and the “barbaric” countryside. The multilayered nature of marriage provides the grounds to detach these spaces from their univocal meanings as established by

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4 The socially subversive potential of Los pazos de Ulloa can be found in other works by Pardo Bazán as well, such as Insolación (1889). This novel was considered to be too sexually graphic and explicit by society’s standards and thus unleashed a “tirade of vitriolic commentary and personal insults” by Pardo Bazán’s literary contemporaries (Colbert 430). Nevertheless, Pardo Bazán demonstrated an admirable resistance to harsh criticism and continued to push social and generic boundaries both in her personal life and in her literary works.
the self-appointed artisans of the modern nation in Spain. The reader is confronted throughout *Los pazos de Ulloa* with symbolic spaces that underscore the gaps of such regulations, pointing towards the possibility of creating social meaning and individual identities beyond the bounds imposed by male-dominated values and the related constraints associated with liberal political theory.

The subversive potential of marriage, which alternately exhibits the capacity to stabilize and the potential to destroy, stems from its ambiguous connection with specific spaces of repression and liberation throughout the novel. Whereas social spaces have often been deemed fixed and unchanging, I will follow Doreen Massey in order to "understand space as an open ongoing production" (55). Massey points out that space is a category that has long been associated with stasis, representation, and closure, which led Foucault to characterize it as "the dead, the fixed" (qtd. in Massey 13). She suggests a reassessment of space as an analytical category by relating it to notions of "openness, heterogeneity, and liveliness" and giving it a "new and more productive life" (19). In so doing, she connects space with processes of formation of subjectivity, thus presenting it as a "dynamic simultaneity" instead of a "static contemporaneity" (55). It could be argued that space can be detached from closure and univocal (objective) representation, and become a category that is "open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming" (59). In this light, we can approach the spaces of the city and the countryside, as presented in *Los pazos de Ulloa*, as open, fluctuating sites whose meanings can be multiple. These spaces and the symbolic meanings associated with them question rather than support the positive social values of the discourse of civilization and its foundational role in liberal projects of nation-formation in nineteenth-century Spain.5

Michael Gerli attests that *Los pazos de Ulloa* centers around "the conflict between the forces of good (civilization) and evil (nature)" (55). While this

5 The portrayal of marriage in nineteenth-century Spanish discourse has received some critical attention. Lou Charnon-Deutsch discusses the dissolution of marriage and, subsequently, of the family unit, which she considers to be "an empty signifier" of patriarchy, in *Los pazos de Ulloa* (122). While women represent the possibility of civilization and social stability—they are "collectively designated and valorized as society's civilizing agents"—the civilizing end cannot be fulfilled in this novel because of the overwhelming forces that overcome the female protagonist, who is stifled by her husband, the patriarchal society that surrounds her, and the barbaric atmosphere in which she is forced to live. Jo Labanyi connects gender to spaces of city and country in *Los pazos de Ulloa*, stating that in an inversion of "normal suppositions," the female is associated with the city and the male with the country (339). She calls attention to the fact that marriage in nineteenth-century Spain not only represented civilization and social stability, but also suffering and repression, particularly for the woman. Labanyi attests that by entering into marriage, the female protagonist in the novel becomes a martyr and that the "consummation of her marriage is anticipated by her as a sacrificial death" (364). Although Joan M. Hoffman does not discuss *Los pazos de Ulloa*, she does comment upon the representation of marriage in Pardo Bazán’s works, particularly her short stories. Hoffman analyzes the "anti-marriage sentiment" (415) present in stories such as "La perla rosa" (1895), "Las vistas" (1901), and "Banquete de boda" (1897). However, instead of discussing the social dilemma of females who are forced to marry, Hoffman examines marriage from the perspective of the male characters and concludes that nineteenth-century men are just as much victims of the institution of marriage as women.
statement is certainly valid, I argue that the forces of “good” and “evil” cannot be so easily defined or assigned to certain spaces. Jo Labanyi refers to the problems associated with the multivalent nature of spaces in the novel, such as the countryside, when she comments that “Pardo Bazán depicts a world where there are only problems for if ‘the natural’ can mean both good and bad, and is and is not in opposition to society, no solution—natural or otherwise—can be wholly satisfactory” (341). Labanyi goes on to mention the multiple meanings of marriage, but she does not delve into the subversive potential of the institution when analyzed in conjunction with spaces of civilization and barbarism. I will expand upon Labanyi’s ideas in order to explain how marriage fluctuates between spaces of city and country in Los pazos de Ulloa, and can be interpreted as a subversive force that disrupts the very society it is supposed to uphold.

To a large degree, the ambiguous portrayal of the institution of marriage in Los pazos de Ulloa might stem from the author’s troubled married life. The dissolution of Pardo Bazán’s marriage can be partially attributed to her ardent feminism as she did not behave in a socially-appropriate way for a nineteenth-century woman. She openly expressed her disdain for traditional women who aspired to nothing more in life than attaining a husband, stating in her novel La prueba (1890) that these were women “cuya inutilidad e intolerable sosera son fruto combinado de la vida anodina, la deficiencia de instrucción, la estrechez de miras y la frivolidad” (633). Pardo Bazán emphasizes the useless frivolity of those women who are interested only in things like clothing and gossip—even going so far as to refer to them as “maniquíes”—and insists on the necessity of creating “una mujer nueva, distinta del tipo general mesocrático.” While the ambiguous portrayal of marriage in Los pazos de Ulloa can be attributed to biographical information, I wish to show that this institution acquires a larger social and political significance as it intersects with social space to highlight the gap between the official discourses regarding the family and the nation-state in nineteenth-century Spain.

In Pardo Bazán’s novel, the first space associated with marriage is the city of Santiago de Compostela, which alternately represents social stability and civilization and repression and unhappiness. When Pedro Moscoso, the Marquis of

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6 In his study of Benito Pérez Galdós’s Doña Perfecta (1876) and Clorinda Matto de Turner’s Aves sin nido (1889), Raúl Álvarez discusses the multivalent nature of nineteenth-century urban and rural spaces in the Hispanic world as he comments that the city, which he describes as “el motor de la sociedad,” can alternately be seen as corrupt, capitalistic, and irreverent, and fun, rich, and moral (4). The country, on the other hand, can fluctuate between representing religion, innocence, and morality, and poverty, corruption, and boredom (4).

7 For more information on Pardo Bazán’s socially deviant behavior and feminist views, and the hardships she faced as a result of her gender in a male-dominated literary world, see Tolliver.

8 The possibility of interpreting the city as an ambiguous space has also been discussed by Raymond Williams in his study of English society since the sixteenth century. He points out that the city can symbolize on the one hand “learning, communication, [and] light” while on the other hand calling to mind “powerful hostile associations . . . as a place of noise, worldliness, and ambition” (1). Williams goes on to comment on the multivalent nature of rural spaces, as the country can represent a “natural way of life: peace, innocence, and simple virtue” while at the same time be seen as a “place of backwardness, ignorance, [and] limitation” (1).
Ulloa, travels from his home in the country to Santiago de Compostela to marry his city-bred cousin, Nucha, the marriage, born in the “civilizing” space of the city, is initially portrayed as an advantageous union. Nucha will bring social propriety and order to Pedro’s life, which, like the dilapidated manorhouse where he resides, is in a state of disarray. Indeed, the female is associated with civilization, as the narrator informs us that women have the ability to civilize even “[a] hombre más agreste” (Los pazos 247). Upon Pedro’s arrival in Santiago de Compostela, the reader is almost immediately made aware of the ambiguous nature of this space. The city is initially presented as a space of eager hopefulness, as much for Pedro, who wishes to take a socially appropriate wife, as for his female cousins who compete for his attention hoping to secure a husband. These young women have been taught the social value of marrying and so attempt to present themselves in the best possible light: “Lo cierto es que, apenas el primo se sentó a platicar con don Manuel, cada niña se escurrió bonitamente, ya a arreglar su tocado, ya a prevenir alojamiento al forastero y platos selectos para la mesa” (210). In the space of the city, the girls demonstrate their willingness to comply with society’s expectations and express excitement at the thought of fulfilling this social obligation. Pedro eventually chooses to marry the physically plain-looking but spiritually virtuous Nucha, thus forming a union that, although not founded on love, will bring social legitimacy and stability to both husband and wife. This marriage is presented as a social contract that takes place between Pedro and Nucha’s father, who, in keeping with traditional mores in nineteenth-century Spain, seeks to comply with social regulations by marrying off Nucha and her three sisters: “Entre los numerosos ejemplares del tipo del padre que desea colocar a sus niñas, ninguno más vehemente que don Manuel Pardo” (209).10

The hopefulness for a stable and proper life that the city represents is contrasted with the disillusionment experienced by Pedro when Santiago—a space which the Marquis refers to as representative of “la civilización”—fails to live up to his expectations of a modern city (215). While he imagined he would find “calles anchas, mucha regularidad en las construcciones, todo nuevo y fl-
mante,” the reality of the “civilized” world proves to be very different: “[E]strechas, torcidas y mal empedradas las calles, fangoso el piso, húmedas las paredes, viejos y ennegrecidos los edificios, pequeño el circuito de la ciudad, postrado su comercio y solitarios casi siempre sus sitios públicos” (215). But the portrayal of the city as a negative space is felt most strongly when discussed in conjunction with the marriage between Pedro and Nucha. This episode provides the first nuanced illustration of Pardo Bazán’s commitment to stress the ambivalence of “civilization” as embodied by the intersection between the space of the city and the institution of marriage. To begin with, as Carlos Feal points out, the wedding ceremony itself, which takes place in the city, is described in “términos verdaderamente lugubres” (215). Far from being depicted as a joyous occasion, the narrator instead compares the wedding to a wake: “Los convidados, tran-
sidos aún del miedo que infunde el terrible sacramento del matrimonio visto de cerca, hablaban bajito, lo mismo que en un duelo” (Los pazos 236). On the couple’s wedding night, the space of the bedroom extends the grave and foreboding nature of the wedding ceremony. As Nucha waits for Pedro to enter the room, she is fearful and ill at ease. Instead of being a space of happy anticipation, the bedroom parallels Nucha’s dark mood and sentiments as it is likened to the church where her somber wedding took place just hours before. As soon as Nucha complies with the social regulations imposed upon her by marriage, the city, which has always been her home, ceases to be a locus of comfort and familiarity and becomes a space of fear and foreboding. Nucha and Pedro spend little time together in the city and their marriage suffers as a result of the growing disconnect between them. Pedro prefers to engage in “masculine” activities that do not involve his wife, such as arguing about politics with his uncle and gambling in the casino. Although Pedro and Nucha are hardly the picture of married bliss in the city, their marriage does remain intact as the social rules are respected and obeyed.

The ambivalent nature of the spaces associated with the married couple in Los pazos de Ulloa is further emphasized when the newlyweds travel from Santiago to Pedro’s home in the countryside. Before Pedro and Nucha arrive in the countryside, the reader has already been exposed to the ambiguous nature of this space. On the one hand, we are informed of the savagery of the land and its effects on its inhabitants, as Pedro’s uncle gives Julián, the priest who has been hired to organize Pedro’s crumbling estate, the following warning: “Encontrará usted a mi sobrino bastante adocenado. . . . La aldea, cuando se cría uno en ella y no sale de allí jamás, envejece, empobrece y embutece” (144). This quotation supports the commonly held dichotomy of urban civilization and rural barbarism. The first glimpses of the Spanish countryside, seen through the eyes of Julián, are in agreement with this characterization, as he immediately notes the untamed wilderness of the land when he exclaims, “¡Qué país de lobos!” (130). Just after this observation, the priest hears gunshots at very close range, points out the “porquería y rusticidad” of the manor, and comments on the state of abandonment of the house. However, the ambiguous nature of this space quickly surfaces as the following day Julián praises the beauty of the rural landscape and describes the country air as “oxigenado y regenerador,” and ultimately compares this
place to an earthly paradise (147). The multilayered significance of the countryside will become even more pronounced with the arrival of the married couple.

During the journey from Santiago to Ulloa, the multiple meanings of the country are projected onto the differing moods of Pedro and Nucha. Pedro, ecstatic to return to his home, chatters with excitement while his melancholy wife, “acurrucada en el rincón del incómodo vehículo, se llevaba a menudo el pañuelo a los ojos” (250–51). The country will serve alternately as a space of joy and hope, and one of repression, unhappiness, and barbarism. Shortly after arriving at the manor house, Nucha happily discovers that she is pregnant. It seems, therefore, that the socially legitimate marriage initiated by Julián and carried out by Pedro and his uncle may indeed prove successful, ironically not in the “civilized” world of the city but instead in the “barbaric” country. Julián views Nucha as the perfect wife, a much-needed civilizing presence in the otherwise savage world of the Spanish countryside, and prides himself on his role in bringing Nucha and Pedro together and, in so doing, promoting social order and stability: “Con desinteresada satisfacción se decía a sí mismo que había logrado contribuir al establecimiento de una cosa gratísima a Dios, e indispensable a la concertada marcha de la sociedad” (257).11 During Nucha’s pregnancy, Pedro seems to take a renewed interest in his wife and the relationship that became distant in the city is revitalized in the country: “Parecía que la leñosa corteza se le iba cayendo poco a poco al marqués, y que su corazón bravío y egoísta se inmutaba, dejando asomar... blandos afectos de esposo y padre” (274). During these fleeting moments of marital happiness, the rural bucolic setting indeed seems to play a pivotal role in the growing closeness between Nucha and Pedro. Each day Pedro takes his wife for “paseos higiénicos” around the grounds of the manorhouse and brings her gifts such as “flores silvestres” and “ramas de madroño” (273–74).

The ever-fluctuating meaning of the countryside also becomes apparent when Pedro’s proper behavior proves to be ephemeral as it is soon revealed that his excitement over becoming a father is limited to the prospect of producing a son and, therefore, a legitimate heir. In a fit of anger, Pedro exclaims that if Nucha should dare to “disobey” him by giving him a daughter, he will “romperle una costilla” (256). In an instant, the countryside ceases to be a harmonious locus of romantic reconciliation and becomes a barbaric space as Pedro’s words reflect its inherent violence and lawlessness. As Pardo Bazán shows in novels such as *La madre naturaleza* (1887), the sequel to *Los pazos de Ulloa*, and *Insolación* (1889), nature is an inescapable and relentless force that civilization is unable to control.12 Significantly, in Pedro’s case, the violence that rears its head in the coun-

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11 Nucha’s potential to encourage order in the manorhouse is discussed not only in relation to Pedro but is also demonstrated by the relationship she forms with Perucho, Pedro’s illegitimate son with his maid Sabel. Due to the fact that Nucha does not know of Perucho’s relation to her husband, she allows herself to grow close to the boy and expresses an interest in civilizing him, both physically and spiritually: “[A]spiraba a enderezar aquel arbolito tierno, civilizándole a la vez la piel y el espíritu” (263). Nucha’s efforts to civilize Perucho come to an abrupt halt, however, when she discovers his identity.

12 On the intersection between nature and processes of nation-formation in Pardo Bazán’s fiction, see Amann.
tryside could also be interpreted as an element of civilization, since according to the social doctrine of the time, the first-born child should be male, thus providing a rightful successor. This detail makes the relation between civilization and barbarism even more complex and ambiguous as the arbitrary and “barbaric” underpinnings of “civilization” are revealed.

The breaking point in the relationship between Pedro and Nucha takes place when Nucha is in labor: at the precise moment of forming a legitimate family, Pedro, after realizing that his child is a girl, turns away from his wife and rekindles his illegitimate relationship with his maid Sabel. Notably, Pedro’s illicit affair with Sabel occurs in the lawless space of the country. His attitude toward women supports the nineteenth-century social double standard according to which men, unlike women, were expected to be sexually active, as a “young man’s machismo impels him to prove sexual superiority, but tradition enforces a girl’s chastity”—men have stronger sexual urges than women, therefore permitting them to practice the sexual act more often and with more partners (Schwartz 477). The widely accepted nineteenth-century dichotomy of civilization and barbarism is inverted here as Pedro glorifies the inherent healthy nature of country women exhibited by Sabel, as he finds her “fresca y apetecible,” and disdains the frail and sickly nature of city women such as his wife, who suffers from the “atroces tormentos” of childbirth (Los pazos 287). Although Nucha is described as being physically weak, prone to sickness, and ill-equipped for childbirth as a result of the fact that she is from the city, it should be pointed out that not all women from the city are portrayed this way. Nucha’s sister, Rita, for example, is in perfect health. Perhaps, therefore, it is not a weakness inherent to her origin that causes Nucha’s suffering and, ultimately, her death, but rather the fact that she leads an unhappy, solitary life in the country as a result of her socially-imposed marriage. While women from the city may be seen as more “civilized,” they are not suited for maternity in comparison with women from the country, whose capacity for natural feminine functions, as the Marquis suggests, is far superior. This distinction that separates women from rural and urban spaces calls attention to the fact that a woman from the city is devalued in the untamed space of the country where her civilized potential cannot be realized.

Although the country is predominantly an oppressive space that breeds adulterous relationships and contributes greatly to the disintegration of Nucha’s relationship with Pedro, its meaning continues to fluctuate. Nucha does experience joyful moments at the manorhouse due to the birth of her daughter and the close friendship she forges with Julián, the priest. Although the relationship that develops between Nucha and Julián is not romantic in nature, it is an “illicit” kind of friendship that runs parallel to Pedro’s adultery but is portrayed in a

13 Maurice Hemingway comments that, based on the contents of a letter written in 1885 by Pardo Bazán to Catalan writer Narcís Oller, it could be argued that Julián’s feelings for Nucha are not purely platonic. In this letter, Pardo Bazán refers to the enamored priest that appears in La Regenta (1884–85) by Leopoldo Alas, and asserts that, although there are some differences, the same type of character appears in Los pazos de Ulloa (175). Hemingway states, however, that Julián’s romantic feelings for Nucha are not made explicit in the novel, perhaps due to the author’s strong Catholic beliefs, since priests in nineteenth-century Spain should not “struggle with illegitimate passions” (40).
positive light. Julián is the only friend that Nucha has made since leaving her father and sisters, and it is significant that she forges this friendship in the country. Lou Charnon-Deutsch comments that "although Julián and Nucha fail in their mission to rescue the 'pazos' from moral and physical decay . . . their very failure reminds us that what they set out to save deserves instead to be lost, while what they find . . . is a sense of connectedness" (116). The connection between Julián and Nucha goes beyond the marital bonds approved and sanctioned by society. Thus, the only truly meaningful relationship that Nucha forges in the novel is created outside the bounds of "civilization," both geographically and institutionally. Along with Julián and her daughter, Nucha forms an alternate "family unit" outside of marriage and away from the "civilized" center of the city. Indeed, Nucha spends a great deal of time with Julián and grows to trust and depend on him almost exclusively, especially when it comes to her child. Their growing friendship also affords Nucha much-needed moments of happiness and laughter, and she shares with Julián, instead of her husband, the joy of raising her daughter. In the end, it is Julián who agrees to help Nucha flee from Ulloa with her baby. The priest realizes that sadly his attempt to forge the perfect, legitimate family—"el matrimonio cristiano cortado por el patrón de la Sacra Familia"—has failed (Los pazos 303). However, what the priest has found with Nucha and her child is an alternative form of collective identity that escapes the stringent social conventions of the time.

Significantly, the final unraveling of the marriage between Nucha and Pedro takes place in a church, the very place where the marriage bond was first sealed. In great contrast to the peace, comfort, and tranquility that this space is traditionally thought to represent, the church is linked instead first to an overarching sense of foreboding during Nucha and Pedro’s funereal wedding ceremony, and later to rebellion and social and familial destabilization as it is in this sacred place that Nucha ultimately decides to leave her husband. The church becomes a space that resonates with the voices of subversion: not only does a wife conspire to leave her husband, but a priest also helps her commit this socially aberrant act. The loveless marriage that Nucha was forced into for the sole purpose of civilizing and stabilizing society has pushed her to take desperate measures. In a conversation that reads very much like the confession of a sinful woman to her priest, Nucha openly discusses her predicament for the first time as she confides to Julián: "Ya sé que es mi obligación: la mujer no debe apartarse del marido. Papá me aconsejó que, de todos modos, me casase con el primo. . . . Yo seguí el consejo. . . . Me propuse ser buena, quererle mucho, obedecerle, cuidar de mis hijos" (386). Despite the priest’s efforts to calm Nucha, she becomes increasingly agitated and exclaims, “¡Estoy harta de tener calma! . . . He agotado todos los medios. . . . No aguardo, no puedo aguardar más” (385). The church extends the ambiguous nature of the country as a whole as it can be interpreted not only as a space of unhappiness and social destabilization but also as one of feminine liberation as it is only here that Nucha is able to give voice to the discontent she has felt since arriving at the Marquis’s estate: “Desde que llegué . . . esta casa tan grande y tan antigua . . . me dio frío en la espalda . . . tengo mucho miedo” (385–86). The church is transformed into a space suspended between civilization—what Julián and Nucha have represented up to this point—and barba-
The difficulty of assigning the countryside a fixed meaning persists until the closing pages of the novel. Just as this space represented freedom and soothing comfort when Nucha planned to leave her husband, so does it represent once again oppression and fear when Pedro discovers her plans and forcefully prevents her from fleeing the manorhouse. While on the one hand, Nucha ultimately dies in the country, on the other hand, it is only through death, in this fluid space, that she can at last find peace, freedom and the hope for spiritual salvation. Thus the manorhouse retains the ambiguous characterization it has had throughout the novel as it at once represents a space of imprisonment and one of liberation. The cause of Nucha’s death is not made explicit but the reader is left to suppose that a combination of her frail health exacerbated by her difficult childbirth and her intense marital unhappiness are to blame. Ten years later, Julián returns to the manorhouse to pay his respects to the fallen woman. Despite the fact that the last descriptions of Nucha depict her as a suffering victim—“sola, abandonada, vendida, ultrajada, calumniada, con las muñecas heridas por mano brutal y el rostro marchito por la enfermedad, el terror y el dolor”—Julián experiences “un sentimiento de consuelo, de bienestar y de alegría, porque la señorita Nucha, en el cielo, estará desquitándose de lo sufrido en esta tierra miserable” (415, 408). The reader is left to conclude that Nucha has finally been freed, albeit through death, from her socially imposed prison. The redemptive and liberating quality of religion, represented throughout the novel by Julián and emphasized here in its final pages, reflects the author’s own strong Catholic beliefs. Instead of focusing on the misery and loneliness that

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14 On the intersection between Pardo Bazán’s Catholicism and her literary works, see Brown.
characterized Nucha’s life with her husband, Pardo Bazán emphasizes the woman’s peaceful afterlife as imagined by her only true friend who is, significantly, a priest. Once again, the “alternate family unit” created outside of the bounds of marriage between Nucha and Julián is stressed as it is the priest, instead of Nucha’s legitimate husband, who mourns her death and rejoices in her salvation.

In nineteenth-century Spain, women were viewed as the social representatives of order and stability, and marriage was seen as a means of controlling and civilized society. In Pardo Bazán’s *Los pazos de Ulloa*, however, the socially appointed marriage ultimately functions as an agent of social destabilization that culminates in adultery, suffering, and death. In this text, it is not the marriage that brings social order, but rather the undoing of such a legitimate union, through the death of the wife—whose deviant behavior cannot be condoned—that ultimately restores social stability. Through an analysis of the places associated with marriage, we become aware of a subversive revision of the social value of space in this novel that tampers with the positive characterization normally attributed to “civilization,” either as represented by urban spaces or the institution of marriage. This reconsideration allows for the configuration of new identities and social meanings that challenge the basic tenets of patriarchal society and the modern nation-state, and break through the bounds imposed by male-dominated values and the related spatial constraints.

WORKS CITED


