

## Femininity and power in social and marital structures: an analysis of the protagonists in *La de Bringas* by Benito Pérez Galdós and *La mortgaged* by María Luisa Bombal.

Feminidad y poder en las estructuras sociales y  
matrimoniales: un análisis de las protagonistas en *La  
de Bringas* de Benito Pérez Galdós y *La amortajada* de  
María Luisa Bombal.



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Received: 28/01/2025 Revised: 12/03/2025 Approved: 13/06/2025

### Abstract.

This article comparatively analyzes femininity and power dynamics in *La de Bringas* by Benito Pérez Galdós and *La amortajada* by María Luisa Bombal. From a critical approach, the strategies of resistance and submission of the protagonists in the face of patriarchal restrictions in their respective historical and cultural contexts are explored.

The study reveals how both authors portray marriage as a space of oppression, where the responses of the protagonists diverge according to the sociocultural particularities of nineteenth-century Spain and Chile in the first half of the twentieth century.

**Key words:** Benito Pérez Galdós. María Luisa Bombal. *La de Bringas*. The shrouded. Comparative literature. Femininity.

### How to cite this article (APA):

In paragraph (parenthetical citation):  
(Abidi, 2025, p. \_\_).

In reference list:

Abidi, Y. (2025). Femininity and power in social and marital structures: an analysis of the protagonists in *La de Bringas* by Benito Pérez Galdós and *La amortajada* by María Luisa Bombal. *Revista Sincronía*. XXIX(88). 218-247. DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88.13.25b

**Resumen.**

Este artículo analiza comparativamente la feminidad y las dinámicas de poder en *La de Bringas* de Benito Pérez Galdós y *La amortajada* de María Luisa Bombal. A partir de un enfoque crítico, se exploran las estrategias de resistencia y sumisión de las protagonistas frente a las restricciones patriarcales en sus respectivos contextos históricos y culturales.

El estudio revela cómo ambos autores retratan el matrimonio como un espacio de opresión, donde las respuestas de las protagonistas divergen según las particularidades socioculturales de la España decimonónica y el Chile de la primera mitad del siglo XX.

**Palabras clave:** Benito Pérez Galdós. María Luisa Bombal. *La de Bringas*. *La amortajada*. Literatura comparada. Feminidad.

**Introduction**

The analysis of femininity and power in literature is key in contemporary criticism, especially with regard to women in patriarchal societies. In this sense, *La de Bringas* (1884) by Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920) and *La amortajada* (1938) by María Luisa Bombal (1910-1980), despite their aesthetic and cultural differences, coincide in exploring these dynamics and female roles in their respective contexts.

Thus, the relevance of this topic lies both in the contribution it represents for the analysis of a Galdosian work less frequented by critics and in the exploration of Bombal's literature, characterized by its brevity and symbolic density, since both novels allow us to criticize the restrictions imposed on women and reveal the power struggles that their protagonists face in their quest for autonomy. The originality of the study thus lies in the comparative and theoretically grounded approach to the two selected works by both authors.

Within this framework, this work demonstrates that gender issues, far from being confined to a specific context, have resonances that transcend time and space. It also aims to enrich the existing critical approaches through a comparative analysis of these works with a feminist approach, a perspective that, although it has been explored, still offers wide margins for new readings. Likewise, the choice of this theme responds to its relevance both in literary studies and in current social debates, since, although the visibility of women in literature has advanced, the works of Galdós and Bombal continue to offer key references for analyzing gender struggles. In this sense, the comparative analysis evidences that marriage persists as a control mechanism and a space where women negotiate their

independence, while, from the academic field, this work establishes a dialogue between Galdós' Spanish realism and Bombal's Spanish-American narrative.

On the other hand, the background<sup>1</sup> that supports this study is found in the growing attention of literary criticism to the intersections between gender, power and literature, as it dialogues with research that has analyzed how Galdós and Bombal question the restrictions imposed on women, although such studies have addressed this issue in a partial manner and have tended to minimize the influence of sociocultural contexts in the representation of women's roles.

In the case of Galdós, his ability to represent women in the constant back-and-forth between submission and resistance has been highlighted. In this line, Rosa Delia González Santana, in "E. Zola and B. Pérez Galdós: the female character in *Fortunata y Jacinta* and *Nana*", compares the construction of female characters within European realism, while Yolanda Arencibia, in "Mujer, novela y sociedad. *Fortunata y Jacinta* de Galdós: los personajes en sus redes", delves into the processes that structure the lives of Galdós' protagonists.

For their part, studies on Bombal have highlighted the symbolism of the female body as a territory of oppression and subversion. In this sense, Adriana Martínez-Fernández, in "Sexo y sensibilidad: recorridos temáticos y discursivos por la narrativa femenina en *La amortajada*, *Cambio de armas* y *La nave de los locos*", considers the body as a space of symbolic insubordination, while María Jesús Orozco Vera, in "La narrativa de María Luisa Bombal: principales claves temáticas", identifies female subjectivity and nature as central metaphors in her work.

In light of the above, this article seeks to fill academic gaps by offering a more nuanced perspective on female representation and her critique of patriarchal constructions that limit women's emancipation. To this end, it proposes to evaluate the repression of women in the societies portrayed by Galdós and Bombal, identify their strategies of rebellion and compare them through an approach that links both literary traditions, while reflecting

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<sup>1</sup> This study is part of the line of research initiated in our doctoral thesis, *Tristana by Benito Pérez Galdós and Eugenia Grandet by Honoré de Balzac: a question of interculturality*, and is also articulated with a previous work published under the title *El machismo en los personajes femeninos principales de Tristana de Benito Pérez Galdós y La última niebla de María Luisa Bombal (Machismo in the main female characters of Tristana by Benito Pérez Galdós and La última niebla by María Luisa Bombal)*.

on the similarities and differences in female representation in the 19th and 20th centuries, showing how such strategies respond to their respective sociocultural contexts.

To achieve the proposed objectives, this study is based on an approach that articulates several analytical frameworks, among them Elaine Showalter's theory of gynocriticism, expounded in "Toward a Feminist Poetics" (1979). This theory proposes a feminist literary analysis that departs from paradigms dominated by male perspectives, privileging the study of literature written by women from their own experience, which is key to the breakdown of Bombal's novel.

Likewise, we will adopt a comparative methodology that examines how the themes are developed in the literary and cultural frameworks of each author, complemented by the analysis of narrative fragments, which guarantees greater objectivity. This is complemented by a bibliographical review that integrates previous studies and related works, which enriches the interpretations and broadens the reflective dimension of the work, aimed at both students of Galdós and Bombal's narrative and specialists in social and cultural history interested in the evolution of female representation in Hispanic Literature.

This work is organized as follows: the first chapter analyzes theoretical and philosophical contributions on patriarchy and power; the second examines *La de Bringas*, focusing on its context and the protagonist as a reflection of patriarchal restrictions and strategies of resistance; the third studies *La amortajada*, highlighting its setting and the evolution of its protagonist. The fourth compares both works from different points of view, and the conclusions synthesize the findings, respond to the objectives set out in this introduction and recommend future lines of research.

### Theoretical and Literary Contributions of Hispanic Feminism

The theory of patriarchy, conceived as an essential analytical framework in gender studies and feminist thought, constitutes an indispensable tool for examining the power structures that have historically regulated relations between men and women. Although its roots lie in the classical tradition, contemporary feminist theory redefines this concept as a dynamic system of domination that privileges the male gender, subordinating the female gender in the social, economic and cultural spheres. This approach has evolved through critical revisions, adapting to specific historical and geographical contexts. In this line, Herreros Hernández (2017) defines patriarchy as:

An ideology of transversal, political and economic structure, with determinant historical roots, which encompasses a set of thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and social and cultural manifestations, by which privileges are granted to the male gender and the female gender is oppressed.(p. 4).

Within this framework, the contributions of contemporary feminist authors from Spain and Latin America have transgressed both the conventions of traditional narrative and the restrictions imposed by hegemonic literary canons. Through their works, they have addressed issues of remarkable complexity, such as the body, sexuality and violence, through approaches that make visible the diversity of women's experiences. These contributions transcend the mere denunciation of the historical marginalization of women by proposing models of representation capable of subverting the dominant literary and social structures.

It should be emphasized that these contributions cannot be examined in isolation, as they are linked to the concept of power, understood as an omnipresent network that permeates all dimensions of human existence. This perspective finds its foundation in the philosophical and sociological theories of Michel Foucault, who posits a non-hierarchical conception of power, characterized by its capacity to operate at all levels of social and cultural life. According to Foucault (2014):

Power should not be conceived from the old pyramidal notion, but from the metaphor of meshes or networks that traverse the social, the political, the scientific, the familiar, in short, any human relationship where some kind of power is always at stake. (p. 14).

From a literary approach, the Foucauldian perspective<sup>2</sup> finds an enrichment in its articulation with feminism and critical theory, by allowing an analysis that transcends the mere reproduction of the structures of patriarchal domination in literary texts. This confluence

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<sup>2</sup> Foucauldian theory on the relationship between power, knowledge and the body was decisive for Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray, thinkers of the feminism of difference who reoriented it towards a critique of language and feminine subjectivity. From this perspective, they analyzed how patriarchal discourses have normativized women's bodies and sexuality, proposing forms of symbolic subversion through writing. Kristeva (with books such as *The Revolution of Poetic Language* and *The Feminine Genius*) distinguishes between the symbolic and the semiotic; Cixous, in *Laughter of the Medusa*, claims for an *écriture féminine* that expresses repressed desire; and Irigaray (with books such as *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *That Sex Which Is Not One*) denounces the phallic logic of Western thought. These proposals offer theoretical keys to interpret, in Galdós and Bombal, the literary representation of the female body as a space of domination and resistance.

highlights how literary works not only perpetuate hegemonic power dynamics, but also configure spaces of resistance, opening up possibilities for reconfiguring established hierarchies. According to Vivero (2016):

Literature becomes a space of contestation and rupture with the socially established, opening the possibility for subversion from subjectivity by recreating other possibilities of coexistence and experience for sexed bodies. (p. 123).

In this way, the gender relations represented in literature not only reveal the dynamics of subordination inherent to social structures, but also make visible the possibilities of transformation in the face of these dynamics. In this framework, Judith Butler's thought acquires a significant transcendence, given that her perspective facilitates an understanding of power, conceived as a phenomenon that is negotiated through gender performativity. This concept, defined as the reiteration of acts that consolidate or challenge prevailing social norms, emphasizes that gender identities lack an immutable character, constantly shaping themselves through discursive and bodily practices.

Likewise, Judith Butler underscores the primordial function of language as a performative act, emphasizing its capacity to influence the construction of identities and the transformation of power relations. From this perspective, language transcends its descriptive role, establishing itself as an active agent in the production of reality. Thus, it becomes an instrument both for the perpetuation of hegemonic structures and for their eventual subversion.

In this aspect, Butler extends her theory of performativity to the realm of political discourse, exploring how discursive practices assume a transformative character. Through these practices, the limits of the normative are questioned, allowing for the emergence of new possibilities in the organization of power. This approach illustrates how language, in its performative dimension, reflects the dynamics of power and, at the same time, substantially challenges them. In his book *Excitable Speech. A politics of the Performative*, Butler analyzes how language plays a central role in the constitution of subjects and the production of identities, implicating itself in both the reproduction and subversion of power relations (Saxe, 2015, p. 8).

This theoretical framework acquires great relevance for the analysis of the characters and the structure of the works, as it makes possible an inquiry aimed at unraveling how such literary creations contribute to the construction and deconstruction of gender hierarchies. It

also opens up new perspectives for exploring new forms of representation and strategies of resistance to the power dynamics present in literary discourses.

### *In Spain*

In Spain, the concept of patriarchy has been the subject of exhaustive analysis by prominent theorists, whose contributions, from philosophical, historical and literary approaches, have enriched feminist thought. Among these figures Celia Amorós stands out, widely recognized as one of the most influential feminist philosophers in the Spanish intellectual sphere. In her work *Hacia una crítica de la razón patriarcal* (1985), Amorós proposes an analysis that reveals the mechanisms by which patriarchal power structures have been legitimized throughout history, especially through cultural discourses.

In this area, Posada Kubissa (2016) points out that "the critique of patriarchal reason in its strictest sense [...] is none other than tracing genealogy as the key to patriarchal legitimization" (p. 226). For the author, the dismantling of these structures requires, therefore, a systematic critique of the ideologies that perpetuate gender inequality. This process also implies the need to recognize and analyze the historical mechanisms that have served as support for the consolidation of these hierarchies, with the aim of deconstructing their foundations.

As a complement to this vision, the Spanish journalist and writer Nuria Varela proposes in her work *Feminism for Beginners* (2005) an informative approach that allows her to analyze the manifestations of patriarchy in everyday life. Her main objective is to bring the theoretical debates of feminism closer to the general public, using understandable language, with the aim of fostering greater social awareness of gender inequalities. From this perspective, Varela argues that one of the main contributions of feminism has been to conceptualize patriarchy not as a simple sum of individual behaviors or sexist attitudes, but as a political system that conditions social relations. This formulation has made it possible to make visible the broad scope of patriarchy, which extends from family and emotional ties to the hierarchies present in the labor, economic and institutional spheres:

Analyzing patriarchy as a political system meant seeing how far the control and domination over women extended. Much of the theoretical richness of feminism in recent decades comes from here. The realization that this patriarchal control also extended to families, sexual and labor relations (Varela, 2005, p. 146).

María-Milagros Rivera Garretas approaches this problem from a historical and cultural perspective in her work *Nombrar el mundo en femenino. Pensamientos de las mujeres y teoría feminista* (1994). In it, the author develops a reflection on the role of rationalism in the emergence of theories that advocate gender equality, highlighting that this project has its roots in European Renaissance Humanism. Rivera Garretas examines how these paradigms contributed to cementing a discourse that, although incipient, began to question the structures of exclusion and to raise the vindication of women's rights in the intellectual and social sphere. As she states, "rationalism especially favored the theoretical development of the project of equality between the sexes that had begun during Humanism in Europe" (Garretas, 1994, p. 48).

In her analysis, Rivera Garretas highlights how historical narratives have played a crucial role in making women's contributions visible, emphasizing, in turn, the importance of revaluing women's historical memory as an instrument to delegitimize the ideological bases of a system of oppression rooted in social structures.

In the literary field, writers such as Cristina Peri Rossi, Rosa Montero and Cristina Morales have integrated feminist analysis into their narratives, addressing the various manifestations of patriarchy through their works. Cristina Peri Rossi, a famous Uruguayan essayist based in Spain, offers a feminist perspective that examines issues such as sexuality and desire in her work *La nave de los locos* (1984). In this text, the author resorts to allegory as a resource that highlights the anguish and rootlessness that characterize the female characters. In this framework, Ampuero and Tapia (2017) highlight that:

In *La nave de los locos* there are various approaches assimilable to the double bind; against the biblical norm of growing and multiplying, based on the primordial condition of fecundity attributed to Eve, the condemnation of sex outside marriage arises and, at the same time, abortion is proposed as a social norm both necessary and guilty (p. 144).

At the same time, Rosa Montero stands out both for her journalistic work, characterized by an explicit commitment to feminism and the visibility of gender issues in the public sphere, and for her prolific literary production, in which these issues occupy a central place. In this context, her novel *La hija del caníbal* (*The Cannibal's Daughter*, 1997) is an example, as she constructs female characters that defy the social expectations traditionally attributed to

women. Through this work, Montero deals with profound themes such as grief, motherhood and the search for identity. In this regard, Rivas (2001) emphasizes that:

In *La hija del caníbal* the parodic functional range acts to create characters that contribute to the exposure of the adjacent themes of the detective story: the motif of identity, the game of appearances and motherhood related to the demystification suffered by the protagonist's parents. (p. 9).

On the other hand, Cristina Morales transcends the limits of conventional narrative with her work *Easy Reading* (2018), in which she deals with the experiences of women with intellectual disabilities, who are trapped in processes of control and normalization within a welfare system that perpetuates structures of exclusion. This approach, combined with her provocative style and intersectional perspective that intertwines issues of gender, class and disability, has consolidated Morales as one of the most influential authors of contemporary Spanish feminist literature. In relation to this work, Gil (2019) notes that:

The sharp individualization of each of the women, together with their detailed personalities, responds to the author's desire, through the use of different styles and forms, to represent various models of insubordination to the oppression of power and its doctrines of normalization. (pp. 627-628).

It is necessary to point out at this point that, although the space available does not allow us to refer to all feminist authors, the aforementioned women writers have made immense contributions through their creative work, which has enriched feminist literary criticism and has attempted to redefine the role of women in all areas of everyday life.

### *In Latin America*

In the Latin American context, the contributions of renowned feminist theorists have been essential for the analysis of the manifestations of patriarchy in the region. Marcela Lagarde, Mexican anthropologist and feminist, in her book *Los cautiverios de las mujeres: madresposas, monjas, putas, presas y locas* (1990), reveals, through an intersectional approach, the interactions between gender, class, ethnicity and culture, showing how these elements perpetuate the symbolic "captivities" that constrain women. In this same line of analysis, Mondaca Cota (2021) addresses the concept of intersectionality, defining it as:

An analytical tool that makes one think and develop strategies that ensure equality and whose scheme allows people the possibility of observing how the discriminations to which they are subjected occur. The term is attributed to the African-American lawyer and academic Kimberlé Crenshaw, in 1989, who started from her experience of being a black woman - being a woman and being black - and understood that her social position was determined by intersecting categories (p. 4).

On the other hand, the Argentine anthropologist Rita Segato develops in her work *La guerra contra las mujeres* (2016) an analysis of gender violence, understood as a mechanism that transcends the domestic sphere. In her argumentation, Segato demonstrates how patriarchy uses violence to reinforce its hegemony, particularly in contexts marked by social inequalities and armed conflicts. In relation to this theme, Segato (2024) presented additional reflections in an article published in the newspaper *El País*, where he stated that :

It is a characteristic of contemporary wars, no longer the insemination of women as spoils of war or annexation of the conquered territory, but their profanation or moral and physical destruction by sexual means to reach, in this way, the Achilles heel of the subjugated people, their dignity and confidence in the institutions. (*El País*).

In the literary field, Hispanic American feminist writers have played a decisive role in the resignification of cultural imaginaries. Marcela Serrano, a renowned Chilean novelist, intertwines, in her work *Antigua vida mía* (1995), personal experiences with collective reflections, stressing the importance of female friendship as a form of resistance to patriarchy. In this sense, Belaarbi (2022) points out that:

The play highlights female ailments, struggles, vicissitudes and concerns. A mirror effect of Chilean society and the reality in which its women lay. Violeta, a generous, loving woman who leads a simple life, has overcome a difficult life, full of pain, abandonment, poverty and mistreatment. Josefa, on the other hand, is a successful woman, an internationally recognized singer, who nevertheless tends to loneliness and suffers from acute insecurity. The protagonists of the play are independent, persevering and fighting characters, who were able to overcome all the ravages they faced in their lives, a constant struggle for liberation and harmony (p. 291). (p. 291).

Argentina's Selva Almada, for her part, has oriented her production towards denouncing gender violence. In *Chicas muertas* (2014), Almada investigates cases of femicide that occurred in small towns, reconstructing the lives of the victims and highlighting the inertia of communities and institutions in the face of these crimes. Through a prose that combines journalistic chronicle with literary narrative, the author highlights the need to make visible these problems, often ignored in official discourses. In the words of Cabral (2018), "the book reconstructs the lives of Sarita Mudín, Andrea Danne and María Luisa Quevedo, young victims of femicides that occurred in different localities in the interior of Argentina during the 1980s" (p. 3).

From Mexico, various authors have constructed narratives that address motherhood, migration and oppression, through a discourse that challenges the dominant hegemonies. According to Hicks (2017):

Rosina Conde, Rosario Sanmiguel, Cristina Pacheco, Nadia Villafuerte, Reyna Grande (based in the United States), Valeria Luiselli (in essays), among others, in their works reconstruct migration, either as a central theme or tangentially. The works of several of these writers feature female characters and their daily experiences, especially on Mexico's northern border. Their characters are mothers, daughters, wives, lovers, friends, from domestic workers to professionals, waitresses, maquila workers, housewives and sex workers (p. 41).

To conclude this section, we have alluded to theorists and writers from Spain and Latin America whose contributions are fundamental for feminist critique, since these authors question philosophical theories and traditional social structures, incorporating a perspective that challenges patriarchal discourses. However, the spectrum of voices that have contributed to this questioning is much broader, including aspects not addressed in this analysis.

### ***The Bringas of Benito Pérez Galdós***

#### ***Historical and social contextualization***

Beginning in the second half of the 19th century, Spain was going through a period of transformations that influenced the configuration of social expectations regarding women and marriage. This historical context developed in the midst of the transition between the

Ancien Régime and modernity, a process in which traditional values, still predominant, began to face the challenges posed by enlightened ideas.

In the social sphere, Spanish women were subordinated to a patriarchal system that imposed gender-defined roles. Within this framework, women were expected to personify virtues such as obedience and modesty. The domestic sphere was considered their natural space, where they were to perform functions related to the care of the family, the education of children and the preservation of morality. This assigned role contrasts sharply with the male role, linked to the public sphere, political participation and economic activity.

Marriage was conceived as the culmination of the feminine ideal and as an institution essentially linked to the social structure. More than a union based on affection, marriage was understood as a contract that functioned as an alliance between families, especially those belonging to the upper and middle classes. Marriage choices, in this sense, were determined by economic and social factors, relegating individual emotions and preferences to a second plane. Likewise, after marriage, women were legally subordinated to the authority of their husbands, who exercised control over their decisions and mobility, thus consolidating their position of dependence within the family and social structure. According to Camino and Martykánová (2021):

The historiography has been building the notion that there were basically two worthy states for a woman in the dominant gender constructs of Catholic political culture: on the one hand, religious spinsterhood, the nun being married to God, and, on the other hand, earthly marriage and biological motherhood. Consequently, women had to choose between marrying a man or marrying God, and from their situation emanated either biological or social motherhood (p. 339).

The influence of the Catholic religion played a determining role in this social and cultural configuration, consolidating ideals of female chastity and fidelity which, in turn, limited the possibilities of divorce or separation. Christian morality regulated the norms of social behavior, shaping an ethical and normative framework that relegated to the margins of society those women who did not comply with the standards imposed by that system.

However, towards the last third of the century, the emergence of reform movements and the expansion of education generated an incipient debate on the situation of women. Although this process was initially restricted to the most privileged sectors, the progressive inclusion of women in education began to question the rigid gender roles imposed by

tradition. In this context, some intellectuals defended the importance of female instruction as part of a broader project of social modernization, arguing that women's education could contribute to the progress of society as a whole.

This interplay between tradition and modernity finds a particularly eloquent reflection in the literary production of the period, most notably in the work of Benito Pérez Galdós, who, through his narrative, strives to capture the tensions inherent in the role assigned to women in nineteenth-century Spanish society.

***Marriage as a space of restrictions and resistance: the case of Rosalía Pipaón***

Benito Pérez Galdós constructs a narrative that problematizes the place of women in nineteenth-century Spanish society by foregrounding the tensions between conformity, resistance, and the power dynamics that structure the life of his female protagonist. Within this framework, the character of Rosalía Pipaón, the central figure of the novel, is portrayed as an archetype of traditional femininity, influenced by the rigid social expectations of her time. From her first appearance, Rosalía is configured as the paradigm of the ideal wife according to nineteenth-century canons, striving to conform to the demands of obedience that define her familial role within marriage. In the words of Arnaud-Duc (2003), "the family is the foundation of social order, so that the rules in charge of organizing marriage and the family are considered public order, since it is in the home that good citizens are formed" (p. 109).

In this sense, Arnaud-Duc contextualizes the role of family and marriage in nineteenth-century society, as he reinforces the idea that marriage rules were private arrangements and elements of social control. As such, this is relevant to understanding the oppression of Rosalia, whose role as a wife is defined within an institutionalized scheme that denies her agency. However, the characterization of the protagonist transcends mere adherence to the social precepts of her time. On the contrary, her domestic life is presented as a space in which internal struggles are manifested, typical of a character trapped between external impositions and her personal longings. Galdós (2007) describes her protagonist and her relationship with her husband in a way that evidences these tensions:

As a faithful wife she would continue at his side, playing her role with that dexterity that so many years of hypocrisy had given her. But for herself she longed ardently for something more than life and health; she wanted a little, even a little bit

of what she had never had, freedom, and to get out, if only figuratively, of that shameful narrowness. (p. 196)

From this perspective, marriage is not described as a space of affection or mutual support, but as an instrument of patriarchal control. This marital model, based on an unequal distribution of roles, grants the husband economic and moral authority, while relegating the wife to the domestic sphere, where her role is reduced to a figure lacking agency. As a result, this dynamic evidences that the relationship between the couple is not based on equality, but on a hierarchy that perpetuates the gender inequalities characteristic of the time.

Moreover, Galdós uses marriage as a mirror of the power dynamics that define his society. Far from constituting a union founded on love, the institution of marriage becomes a means to perpetuate a social order that favors patriarchy. In this context, Rosalía Pipaón embodies women trapped in a cycle of submission, legitimized by a structure that finds sustenance in both legality and traditional moral norms. In relation to this, Jiménez Gómez (2018) points out:

Rosalía's patriarchal educating function is also directed to her daughter Isabelita according to the doctrines of good wife and bourgeois mother: spend little and abide by the husband's rules and educate and safeguard the virtue and decorum especially of the daughters. (p. 155)

In this sense, Rosalía not only embodies a female subjectivity shaped by patriarchy, but also acts as a reproductive agent of its logics. From her position as a mother, she perpetuates gender hierarchies in both the domestic and social spheres, consolidating an archetype of woman who, despite exhibiting disruptive attitudes, continues to operate under the dominant phallogocentric paradigm. The moral authority she exercises over Isabelita, based on principles such as austerity, modesty and conjugal obedience, is aligned with the social mandate that delimits the female body and behavior as a territory of male control, thus reinforcing the configuration of women as property of the patriarchal order. In correlation with this, Jiménez Gómez (2019) states:

The differences in the education between Paquito, eldest son of the Bringas, and Isabelita will be supported by both parents. These favor, on the one hand, the study and intelligence in the firstborn male but, on the other hand, only develop the decorative arts, such as playing the piano, in the younger daughter in order to delight

and entertain the attendees at dances, gatherings and other social ceremonies (p. 91).

Now, the marriage between Rosalía and her husband, Francisco Bringas, offers a paradigmatic representation of power relations in nineteenth-century Spain, illustrating the gender inequalities that characterized this institution during the nineteenth century. From the beginning of the narrative, Rosalía's life is determined by her bond with Francisco, a bureaucrat whose rigid personality symbolizes male authority within the household.

Significantly, the physical and psychological description of Francisco Bringas suggests a relationship devoid of mutual attraction, which reinforces the utilitarian nature of their marriage. According to Tubert (1997), "their marital relationship is completely uneroticized; she has no more than the instrumental function of wife, mother and housewife, with no possibility of desiring or being desired" (p. 377).

Bringas's austere and meticulous character not only places him as a symbol of the nineteenth-century masculine ideal, but also turns domestic economy into a tool of domination. His obsession with financial control restricts Rosalía's autonomy, placing her in a subordinate position both materially and symbolically. This subordination is manifested, on the one hand, in Rosalía's inability to manage household resources without her husband's approval and, on the other, in the way every aspect of her behavior is regulated under Francisco's gaze.

The power imbalance is accentuated by the position of vulnerability in which Rosalía finds herself. Caught between the constraints of gender and the limitations of her social class, her economic dependence not only reveals the oppression inherent in the patriarchal system, but also confines her to a role of passive consumer, subject to the judgment of her social environment. This situation, loaded with frustrations, leads her to an emotional isolation that Galdós illustrates through the scenes of confinement in the *camón*. In relation to this, Mellado (2006) argues:

The *Camón* allows Rosalía to communicate and share her fervor for the rags, it makes it possible for her to make two emotional movements: that of distancing and isolating herself from the family and its problems, and that of getting closer to herself, to self-knowledge. These different movements are translated into an identical spatial action: the protagonist's confinement in this room. In the first case, when she withdraws from the conflicts at home, it is well exemplified by the scene

in chapter XXXIII in which Rosalía, fed up with the domestic surveillance of her blind husband. (p. 277).

Thus, the camón symbolizes a refuge for Rosalía, since her voluntary confinements represent a form of distancing herself from her husband's surveillance. From this perspective, by emphasizing that the camón allows her both to get away from problems and to find herself again, this reference adds a psychological dimension to the character's analysis. Thus, marriage manifests itself as a space of alienation for Rosalía, in which an unequal distribution of roles predominates, requiring the subordination of her personal aspirations to her husband's expectations. However, this conjugal relationship is not free of contradictions, since, although Rosalía is economically dependent on Francisco, he also needs her to preserve the appearance of a well-managed household. However, this interdependence unfolds within a framework that gives the husband the exclusive figure of authority.

All these power ties translate into a conflict between patriarchal authority and the strategies of resistance that Rosalía develops in an attempt to assert herself. Although her behavior appears to conform superficially to social norms, Rosalía resorts to actions that, while subtle, manifest her dissatisfaction with the restrictions and her desire to transcend them. These strategies, although they do not challenge head-on the power structures that constrain her, constitute attempts to assert her individuality.

One of the most obvious forms of resistance is found in Rosalía's recourse to hypocrisy and deception, complemented by the use of tactics such as indebtedness. This cunning, far from being simply a negative personal trait, reveals the discomfort she feels. In this sense, Jiménez Gómez (2018) notes:

From here on, the witty and cunning Rosalía will develop an ability to represent a double face before her husband, thus becoming, in this way, an expert narrator of feigned stories. The wife's double game leads to the false value judgments to which she subjects her confidant Milagros in the presence of Don Francisco about the Marquise's squandering and debts. This assured Rosalía of continuing to preserve her role as a blameless and honorable wife. (p. 168).

Likewise, Rosalia's eagerness to acquire gifts and luxury objects can be understood as a response to her lack of real power<sup>3</sup>. In this case, luxury transcends its material function and becomes a symbolic means to reaffirm an identity that aspires to overcome domestic monotony. In this regard, Galdós (2007) describes how Agustín's gifts awaken in Rosalía a desire for vanity:

That blessed Agustín had been, generously and without thinking, the corrupter of her cousin; he had been the snake of good faith that put into her head the most dangerous vanities that can hollow out a woman's brain. The little gifts were the fruit whose sweetness took away her innocence, and because of them an angel with a satin sword drove her out of that Paradise in which her Bringas held her. (pp. 92-93)

Similarly, Rosalia's obsession with social status and appearance reflects an attempt to overcome the restrictions that relegate her to a secondary position. These actions, together with the excessive spending on material goods and clothing, although on the surface they may seem frivolous, constitute a form of silent resistance to the male control that enslaves her. In this regard, Corujo Martín (2020) suggests that "The fascination for fashionable objects can be interpreted as a female transgressive activity that, therefore, needs to be monitored by patriarchal authority. Rosalía, despite her consumerist greed, reveals an unparalleled sartorial talent" (p. 78).

Another strategy Rosalia employs lies in her interaction with figures outside her marriage. Despite her apparent conformity, she manifests a struggle between the imperatives of her social role and her own desires. Initially, she attempts to flirt with her cousin Agustín Caballero; later, she establishes a relationship with Manuel Pez, whom she tries to persuade to lend her money, hinting at the possibility of sexual favors as compensation. This last character represents an escape valve against marital impositions and a way to reaffirm her femininity outside Bringas' control. However, the superficiality of this relationship underlines Rosalía's impossibility to break with the established order.

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<sup>3</sup> Both Jon Juaristi, in his article "*Irony, picaresque and parody in La de Bringas*" (1990), and Cristina Jiménez, in her work *Construcción de los personajes femeninos galdosianos desde una perspectiva de mujer*, establish an analogy between Rosalía's eagerness for consumption and the food voracity of the picaresque archetype, which allows us to reveal a parodic dimension in the configuration of the character. Juaristi warns that Rosalía reproduces a cunning and opportunistic survival logic typical of the rogue. For her part, Jiménez deepens this interpretation by considering that this consumerist impulse constitutes a manifestation of the social control devices that model feminine desire through luxury and appearance.

These strategies of resistance fall short of radically questioning the power structures that oppress her. Her inability to change the system makes her a tragic figure in the Galdósian universe. Through her, Galdós highlights the persistence of a patriarchal order that, despite the cracks that these forms of resistance may open, remains unalterable. In this society, money and property are male prerogatives, and when a woman aspires to integrate into the economic sphere and exercise spending power, she is often forced to objectify herself.

### **Analysis of *La amortajada* by María Luisa Bombal**

#### ***Historical and social contextualization***

Twentieth-century Chilean society underwent transformations in various spheres. During this period, expectations about the role of women in the family and marriage were configured in a delicate balance between tradition and modernization. At the beginning of the century, the Chilean woman was conceived mainly as a being destined to fulfill a domestic role, centered on motherhood, home care and support for her husband. This vision, rooted in a patriarchal culture, restricted women's access to education and limited their participation in the labor market.

Marriage was conceived as the culmination of feminine life, imposing on women the responsibility of raising children and managing the household, in accordance with the ideal of the "devoted mother and wife". In this context, the Catholic Church exercised a determining influence in the consolidation of these ideals. Molyneux (2001) argues that, under these conditions, female participation in public life acquired a reforming character, since:

Altruism as a quality proper to women (founded on motherhood) was thus opposed to the selfish individualism of men, endowing motherhood and domesticity with a moral and political value, which acquires particular characteristics according to the socio-historical context. (p. 12).

As the century progressed, feminist and civil rights movements began to appear, demanding greater integration of women in society. In this context, the struggle for the right to vote and access to labor rights intensified. In 1949, Chile finally recognized women's suffrage. However, despite these advances, traditional conceptions of women's role in the family and marriage remained in force and did not change until the last decades of the century.

***From oppression to emancipation: Ana María's transformation***

*La amortajada* adopts an unconventional narrative structure, presenting a protagonist who reconstructs the episodes of her life from the perspective of death. With this groundbreaking work, which marked a new direction in Spanish-American narrative, Bombal blurred the boundaries between life and death, between the real and the fantastic, creating a literary universe that overflows the limits of the rational. According to Cunningham (1982), who quotes the author's own statements in an interview, the work reflects the story of "a woman who contemplates another woman, feels compassion for what happened to her in life and only understands in death".

The heroine Ana María, trapped in a system that defines women in terms of their usefulness to men, embodies the traditional roles of Chilean women in the early 20th century: initially, as a capricious and fickle young woman; then, as an unsatisfied wife; later, as a self-sacrificing mother; and finally, as an unattainable lover. Each stage of her life responds to the conservative values of her environment, such as obedience, purity, ignorance and discretion.

In her relationship with Ricardo, her first love, a paradoxical fascination with a man whose oppressive authority subjugates her is evident. Ana María describes him as "a dreadful executioner" who, nevertheless, "exercised over us a kind of fascination" (Bombal, 1941, p. 11). Despite her love, Ricardo abandons her, reproducing the power dynamics that will mark her life and perpetuating her submission to the patriarchal order.

Later, Ana María, pressured by her father and scorned by Ricardo, agrees to marry Antonio, which condemns her to a suffocating existence. This marriage, based on subordination and lack of love, forces her to pretend a non-existent happiness while facing her husband's infidelities. Antonio embodies the authoritarian figure that restricts her world, showing himself distant and despotic, which intensifies Ana María's loneliness. Thus, marriage becomes a prison that annuls her identity, relegating her to the role of an obedient wife. In Spinelli's words (2022):

Bombal portrays that femininity that needs the male cooing to walk through life, but that, in reality, is the victim of abandonment, condemned to a life with a husband who turns his back to sleep or betrays her (p. 18).

This description by Spinelli evidences that Ana María's marriage is a union based on abandonment, while emphasizing the contrast between the social expectation of the woman as "protected" by her husband and the reality of her loneliness and suffering, given the obstacles faced by women who, determined by a desolate and illusory search for love, are denied their personal fulfillment in a society that accentuates their oppression.

The emotional emptiness of the protagonist is echoed in the images of a sterile nature that Bombal uses to describe her experience. In this sense, Schoennebeck (2015) highlights that "Bombal's landscape with which the woman identifies is the space in which paradoxically the subject is delocalized, misplaced, losing her hold on the discourses of gender and nation" (p. 257), thus emphasizing how the protagonist is uprooted and stripped of identity in a system that dominates her.

Ana María, caged within a macho order, suffers the frustration of her personal aspirations, symbolized in the title of the novel and the image of the shrouded body. This state not only alludes to closure, but also constitutes a metaphor of liberation from earthly impositions. In this context, death is interpreted as the culmination of an existence sacrificed to a system that annihilated her dreams, but also as a transformative process that enables a rebirth. As a space of transition, death confers on the protagonist a clarity unattainable in life, allowing her to review her choices and understand the frustrations that shaped her existence.

This transition also invites reflection on questions such as the one posed by Bombal (1941): "Why should a woman's nature be such that a man must always be the axis of her life" (p. 74). Through this introspection, Ana María re-signifies the values that guided her life and acquires a new understanding of her post-mortem freedom. According to Hosiasson (2024):

Ana María's rememorative movement - dead but not yet entered into 'final death' - processes a general re-dimensioning that shows, among other aspects, the value that religion, pain, motherhood, passion, the discovery of sex and the difference between sex and feeling had for her (p. 44).

Thus, death acts as a space of revelation that allows Ana María to reinterpret her life and achieve a symbolic emancipation, in which she recognizes that her dissatisfaction was not only a consequence of social restrictions, but also of her inability to face them, since her life,

conditioned by expectations of obedience and chastity, is the reflection of an incomplete existence.

The lyricism with which Bombal describes Ana María's death suggests that only in this state does the protagonist achieve the freedom that was denied her in life, thus exhibiting the enormous difficulties faced by women in achieving autonomy. In this context, death not only means rest after an existence marked by suffering and dependence on the men who defined her life, but also a journey into the past that allows her to review the key moments of her married life and to polemicize the oppression inherent in this institution.

Although marriage, as an institution, perpetuates her asphyxia, Bombal shows how it also propelled, belatedly, her capacity for reflection. From the perspective granted by death, Ana María understands that living with Antonio intensified her frustration, transforming her initial irritation into a silent and strengthening hatred: "they turned her timid rancor into a well-determined idea of revenge. And hatred then came to prolong the bond that united her to Antonio. Hatred, yes, a silent hatred that instead of consuming her fortified her" (Bombal, 1941, p. 75).

The symbolism of death is connected to images of nature, labeling its role as part of a cycle of transformation. For Ana María, nature not only follows its course, but redefines death, showing it not as a tragic end, but as an incorporation into a higher natural order. Elements such as water, trees and light suggest a return to a primordial state where death symbolizes its reintegration into the universe.

This process is described through the powerful symbolism of the earth: "Born of her body, she felt an infinity of roots sinking and spreading into the earth like a thriving spider's web through which the constant palpitation of the universe trembled up to her" (Bombal, 1941, p. 91). In turn, rain is presented as an agent of fertility, reinforcing the link with the natural cycle: "Ah, if men knew what lies beneath them, they would not find it so simple to drink the water from the fountains! For everything sleeps in the earth and everything awakens from the earth" (Bombal, 1941, p. 91). In this way, death, far from being a tragedy, becomes a reconciling process that grants Ana María the definitive liberation.

To epilogue this chapter, we can affirm that Bombal masterfully explored the central axis of the work and symbolically linked women with nature, conceived as a redoubt unavailable to male hegemony. In the same way, he introduced the supernatural to configure an atmosphere that tensions the limits between the tangible and the intangible. Thanks to

this combination and confluence of elements, María Luisa Bombal managed to consolidate herself as one of the first female voices to move away from the molds of criollismo, a literary trend characterized by the meticulous representation of rural life, vernacular customs and native landscapes, with a marked emphasis on the telluric, the picturesque and the regional. In contrast to this tradition, Bombal proposed a writing with a strong subjective and introspective imprint, in which the symbolic and the fantastic take center stage, and where the feminine experience occupies a central place. Her narrative delves into the inner worlds of her female characters, subtly exploring their desires, conflicts and existential tensions.

### Comparison of *La de Bringas* and *La amortajada*

In this section, and after the analysis developed in the previous chapters, we will compare the most salient aspects of both works.

First, although the ideologies of Galdós and Bombal show affinities in addressing the relationship between society and women, the historical moment and the cultural reality that frame their narratives are different. On the one hand, *La de Bringas* is inscribed in social realism in Spain, a period where the social norms that governed women's lives were influenced by patriarchal morality. In this context, Galdós makes a subtle critique of the structures of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, focusing on the restrictions on the role of women. On the other hand, *La amortajada* takes place in the third decade of the twentieth century, a time when traditional gender roles were beginning to be questioned more forcefully.

Bombal's criticism, therefore, is more direct and biting. In this sense, it is pertinent to point out that the temporal and cultural distance between both literary productions does not prevent us from finding convergences in the questioning of patriarchal oppression. While Galdós conceals his criticism under the garb of irony and costumbrismo, Bombal radicalizes the discourse by entering into the feminine interiority through a register that subverts traditional narrative forms. This formal difference responds, in part, to the evolution of the conceptions of the female subject, no longer only as an object of observation but also as an instance of enunciation with its own voice.

In addition to the differences in the historical, social and cultural context, the approach to the subject of women in society and power relations also varies. While *La de*

*Bringas* focuses primarily on external social pressures, *La amortajada* delves into the internal and psychological tensions faced by women within marriage.

This divergence reveals not only an evolution in the treatment of the female subject, but also a transformation in the way gender conflict is represented. Galdós situates his protagonist within a deterministic framework where alienation manifests itself through the domestic and the economic; Bombal, on the other hand, constructs a narrative that allows us to glimpse the inner drama of a woman who has internalized the logics of subjugation. Thus, the social and the psychic converge in both works as complementary dimensions of patriarchal power.

In relation to the representation of marital submission, in *La de Bringas*, the supposed social and economic subordination of the protagonist is, to a large extent, deceptive. Through her purchases and the loans she accumulates, she manages to put in check her husband's economic control and break with the traditional role of wife and mother limited to the domestic space. Her habits lead her again and again to the public space and the world of money, where she deals directly with moneylenders and merchants, that is, in a field that at that time was reserved for men.

In contrast, in *La amortajada*, marriage is described as an existential condemnation for Ana María, whose submission acquires a psychological dimension. It is worth noting that this difference in the form of submission projects two modalities of resistance: one external, strategic and performative in the case of Rosalía, and the other internal, introspective and silent in Ana María's case. The former operates in the realm of simulacra and duplicity - through economic and social manipulation- while the latter unfolds as a process of post-mortem deconstruction that allows for the resignification of the protagonist's life trajectory. In both, however, the impossibility of a full emancipation in a system that reserves a subordinate role for women, whether by contractual or affective means, is evident.

Another aspect that deserves to be compared is the way in which both protagonists face social and marital limitations, because, although both works deal with this conflict, the responses of the protagonists differ.

In *La de Bringas*, marriage is presented as an institution that can be manipulated to obtain specific benefits. The protagonist, despite apparently accepting the imposed social roles, uses the rules of the patriarchal system to her own benefit, adapting strategically. Her

resistance, therefore, does not materialize as a direct opposition to the system, but as a calculated survival within the limits established by the social norms.

This capacity for adaptation can be understood as a form of domestic micropolitics, where subversion is exercised from moral ambiguity and dissimulation. Rosalia, far from representing a tragic heroine, embodies the type of female subject who negotiates her position from cunning, thus revealing the porosity of the ideal wife model promoted by nineteenth-century morality.

In contrast, *La amortajada* exposes a more visceral and tragic experience of marital oppression. Bombal's protagonist shows a greater awareness of her lack of autonomy, which contrasts with Rosalía's more pragmatic submission. In this case, resistance is not translated into tangible acts or visible strategies, but rather into a process of inner revelation that takes place after her death.

Through this post-mortem introspection, Bombal gives voice to an emotional and silent struggle against patriarchal structures, highlighting a resistance that finds its denouement in death. In this framework, death functions as a liminal space, as a threshold of consciousness where the woman -already exempted from her social function- can access a revealing truth about her existence. The Chilean author thus elaborates an ethics of posthumous resistance, in which the shrouded body, far from being a symbol of closure, becomes a territory of symbolic redemption.

On the other hand, stylistic differences are also evident. While Galdós uses a descriptive language typical of realism, Bombal resorts to a language loaded with symbols and metaphors linked to nature. These images reveal marriage as a paradoxical space that, although oppressive, can also foster self-knowledge in Ana María, something that is not found in Galdós' narrative or in her protagonist, Rosalía.

This stylistic divergence is not merely ornamental, but is due to a different conception of the female subject. Galdós constructs Rosalía from the outside, through the gaze of the omniscient narrator who dissects her behavior. Bombal, on the other hand, introduces us to Ana María's interiority through a narrative voice that fuses the sensorial, the lyrical and the fantastic, revealing a fractured but lucid subjectivity. Thus, while Galdós denounces repression through realist irony, Bombal opts for a writing that yields to emotions, symbols and silences, giving rise to a more ontological representation of female suffering.

## Conclusions

By way of conclusion, *La de Bringas* by Benito Pérez Galdós and *La amortajada* by María Luisa Bombal transcend their merely literary dimension, becoming vehicles of social criticism. These novels, along with others by prominent Hispanic authors, have constituted a solid base for the strengthening of feminism in the Hispanic sphere, at the same time that they have left testimonies about the situation of women in various countries of the Hispanic world.

Through a critical and comparative analysis, this article has investigated how both works address patriarchal dynamics and the tensions between femininity, power and resistance in contexts characterized by oppressive structures. In this sense, it is highlighted that marriage, by institutionalizing gender inequalities, not only evidenced women's marital unhappiness, but also annulled their individual identity. It also examined the desire for female autonomy and the various strategies of resistance that the protagonists deployed in the face of these impositions.

It should be noted that these themes are closely linked to the historical context of the time, marked by the rise of the bourgeoisie as the dominant class. In this sense, the work of Galdós and Bombal is configured as a critical reflection of the social reality of their time. Being influenced by bourgeois hegemony, these novels not only represent its values and characteristics, but also expose the problems inherent to this class.

In view of the above, we can affirm that, as we stated in the introduction, Benito Pérez Galdós and María Luisa Bombal constitute fundamental pillars in Spanish realist literature and Chilean literature of the twentieth century, respectively. Both authors, from their own literary traditions, forge discourses characterized by feminocentric perspectives that, although in the case of Galdós they are not always articulated from an explicit feminist consciousness, they do evidence a critical sensitivity towards the condition of women in their time, challenging -with varying degrees of subtlety and ambiguity- the norms of their historical contexts.

Finally, we can only propose a more detailed and exhaustive analysis of other aspects present in the novels, such as narrative style, the characterization of other male and female characters, the construction of space and the symbolism of clothing, among other elements. Likewise, it would be very useful to study the female protagonists analyzed in this study in relation to other works by Galdós and Bombal, which would further enrich the understanding of their contributions to the development of critical discourses on gender and society.

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