

Maternity Ward Horrors: Urban Motherhood in Carmen de Burgos's *La rampa*

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Abstract: In *La rampa*, Burgos highlights the growing demographic of single, working women in Madrid, yet the most prominent female issue explored is the experience of becoming a mother. Drawing on Foucault and Kristeva, this paper demonstrates how Burgos demystifies the traditionally lyricized concept of motherhood ('ángel del hogar') through a detailed depiction of Madrid's charitable maternity ward. In the process, *La rampa* fashions a modern counter-discourse to the patriarchal, anti-feminist rhetoric idealizing the mother role.

Keywords: Carmen de Burgos – Madrid – motherhood – *ángel del hogar* – feminism

Amidst the burgeoning social, economic and urban landscape of early twentieth-century Madrid, a growing demographic of predominantly single women began to work outside the home as factory workers, domestic servants, and shopkeepers. In her novel *La rampa* (1917), Carmen de Burgos presents us with a type of *bildungsroman* of these brave and hard-working women who came to Madrid hoping to establish an economically independent and modern lifestyle (Ugarte 95). In fact, Michael Ugarte credits Burgos's novel with dealing "more thoroughly with the condition of women in the city than any canonical Madrid narrative published in the early twentieth century" (95). In *La rampa*, Burgos's detailed account of these women navigating what often proved to be an oppressive and debilitating urban environment leaves little to the imagination, often presenting difficult situations and crude imagery in a rather objective manner. In this respect, Roberta Johnson has emphasized the exceptional character of Burgos's narrative fiction as a unique form of "social modernism" that "flies in the face of tradition" ("Carmen de Burgos" 75). Indeed, Burgos's social consciousness and her implicit critique of traditional values and societal structures are evident in *La rampa*. However, to understand the force of this critique, it is imperative to consider the distinctly female audience to which this book is dedicated. The dedication reads: "A toda esa multitud de mujeres desvalidas y desorientadas, que han venido a mí... y me han hecho sentir su tragedia" (Burgos, *La rampa* 1). In light of this gendered, personal dedication, it follows that the novel lays bare quite gender-specific themes, particularly those concerns unique to the female sex. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Burgos's portrayal of pregnancy and the general

experience of being (or becoming) a mother amidst the relentless demands of a chaotic city in the process of rapid modernization.

Anja Louis has categorized Burgos's fiction as a "consciousness-raising exercise" for her contemporary society (165). In addition to this apt classification, it is my contention that *La rampa* more precisely functions as a didactic text, exposing and demystifying the traditionally lyricized concept of motherhood which formed the crux of the conservative *ángel del hogar* paradigm.¹ According to this model, a woman's role as a self-sacrificing and wholly domestic mother is lionized not only as the epitome of feminine virtue, but also as her most meaningful and significant social responsibility. Problematically, as a celebrated female archetype, the *ángel del hogar* was dependent on paradoxical characteristics: sexual purity and maternity (motherhood), modeled after the Virgin Mary (Jago and Enríquez 28-33). This construct enjoyed a resurgence in the nineteenth century through an enormous range of print literature. These varied publications defined the model woman as a wife and mother who would act in a saintly manner, educate her children, and make the home a pleasing space for her husband (23-24).² Moreover, female writers sponsored by Isabel II produced moralizing conduct manuals that further reinforced the traditional, domestic role that Catholic ideology prescribed for women. For example, María del Pilar Sinués de Marco's lengthy study, *El ángel del hogar* (1859), repeatedly emphasizes that a woman's duties to her husband and children in the private sphere should be prioritized over any of her own personal interests or desires. Sinués even places women's literature in this context: "la literatura de la mujer debe servir únicamente para educar á sus hijos y embellecer el hogar doméstico" (I: 134).³

As a result, this intimate connection drawn between woman and mother – and the subsequent reverence and praise for this domestic role – established a conflation of feminine identities that was not only prevalent, but the preferred model of womanhood in Spain at the turn of the twentieth century.⁴ In *La rampa*, which appeared just over

¹The rhetoric surrounding the *ángel del hogar* is rooted in Fray Luis de León's 1583 conduct manual *La perfecta casada*.

² According to Jago and Enríquez, the majority of publications (including feminine magazines, conduct manuals, novels, school programs, legislation, and medical texts) "declaran que las ocupaciones apropiadas para la mujer – su 'misión', en el lenguaje de la época – son el matrimonio, la maternidad y la domesticidad. A este respecto, los autores se inscriben dentro de una larga tradición de recomendaciones patriarcales para que las actividades de la mujer se limitasen a las esfera de la casa y la reproducción" (24).

³ Urruela points out that despite "ese ideal femenino del 'ángel del hogar' que se detecta en su obra," Sinués herself was an economically independent professional writer who never had children, and eventually separated from her husband (158). She suggests that this tension between her life and her literary production creates ambiguities in Sinués's work that should be further examined by literary scholars (159).

⁴ Nash explains that a traditional Spanish woman's cultural identity in the early twentieth century was still largely shaped around her role as wife and mother: "Motherhood figured as the maximum horizon for women's self-fulfillment and social role. Women's cultural identity was shaped through marriage and motherhood to the exclusion of any other social or professional undertakings... [By 1910]

fifty years after Sinués's text, Burgos rejects the propagation of this supposedly blissful and fulfilling female role by revealing to readers the harsh realities of pregnancy and motherhood for working-class women in urban Madrid. Through the principal female protagonist Isabel, her unexpected pregnancy, and her ultimately tragic experience as a mother, *La rampa* makes visible aspects of maternity conspicuously absent from the *ángel del hogar* discourse: the institutionalization of single or poor expectant mothers in "maternity houses," the economic strain of a child, and the intense physical and psychological challenges that accompany a woman's corporeal transformation. Climactically, Burgos suggests the futility of finding economic stability, emotional reciprocity, or even happiness in the traditional maternal role of wife and mother that had for so long defined a woman's most honorable position within Spanish society.

By the time Burgos published *La rampa* in 1917, the ambitious goals of what historians and scholars like Marlene LeGates refer to as first-wave feminism had become increasingly prevalent in England, the United States and many western European countries.⁵ In Spain however, early feminist activity materialized quite uniquely, as Geraldine Scanlon has pointed out (3-12). While the majority of women's movements emphasized women's suffrage and subsequent participation in all aspects of socio-political life, the movement in Spain centered more on education. Shirley Mangini describes it as "un imprescindible movimiento pedagógico masivo para las mujeres españolas" (93). In fact, many Spanish women who identified as feminists did *not* initially fight for women's suffrage (including Burgos, who only advocated suffrage later in her life, believing women were too uneducated to participate in politics and government).⁶ As a result of the pedagogical focus which would prepare women for higher education and possible careers outside of the home, women began questioning Spain's time-honored cultural discourse of woman as the *ángel del hogar*. Weakened by a new portrayal of the "nueva mujer moderna" who would leave the home, enter the public sphere, and contribute to society as an independent citizen (Larson xv), the *ángel del hogar* quickly became a much less desirable female role. While Mary Nash points out that women had indeed worked in industry, commerce and domestic service throughout Spain's industrialization, "discourse on women's wage work did not reflect women's

the biological function of reproduction had already become the key component in structuring women's cultural identity" ("Un/Contested Identities" 27). Early twentieth-century feminists, like Burgos, began to challenge this construction.

⁵LeGates defines "first-wave feminism" as the movement beginning in the early to mid-nineteenth century and extending into the early twentieth century, focusing on North American and Western European movements in which middle-class women began forming "sophisticated organizations in an attempt to achieve personal autonomy and exert influence on public life" (232). First-wave feminists attacked the following issues: "the male monopoly of education, professional careers, and culture; married women's economic and legal dependence; sexual and moral double standards; women's lack of control over their bodies; the drudgery of housework; low wages... women's exclusion from politics" (197).

⁶Burgos defended this position, noting that the same could be said for uneducated men; other Spanish feminists rejected female suffrage for similar reasons (Mangini 95-96).

constant life-time labor experience but rather rendered women's work invisible" (*Defying* 25).⁷ In fact, during the early years of the twentieth century, and especially during the First World War, many more women entered the workforce, and their increased presence in the public sphere made them a notable demographic in the 1917 Madrid Burgos depicts in *La rampa*.⁸ As a result, women's labor became increasingly "visible" (to use Nash's terminology), and men and conservative institutions like the Catholic Church considered this increased female presence in the public sphere a potential threat, specifically to the ideological principles that structured the traditional family as it was defined and valued by western patriarchal societies.⁹ To counteract this perceived feminine threat, social and political institutions labored to construct a powerful counter-argument which would significantly hinder women's path to emancipation. Employing positivist discourses, scientists, doctors and philosophers aimed to provide so-called indisputable truths that would prove women's innate inferiority and justify their "proper" place in the private sphere as dutiful wives and mothers.¹⁰ This anti-feminist rhetoric infuriated Burgos, who resented the unfair portrayal of feminism as the "enemigo del hombre, que disolvía el hogar y constituía la negación del amor" (Burgos, *La mujer* 65).

While the feminist question was an effective way to adapt women to social changes and provide them with new opportunities to work in the public domain, these new possibilities had not completely displaced the traditional concept of female identity and honor based largely on the private/familial sphere. Thus, two conflicting philosophies complicated the emergence of a single, coherent ideology which could be

⁷ Capel Martínez explains that as early as the eighteenth century, women were a significant presence in the textile and tobacco industries, both of which "stand out in the process of initiating Spanish women into the world of the factory. Female textile workers were noteworthy for their large numbers: 51,519 in 1900; 127,321 in 1930 ... and women workers in tobacco factories achieved a virtual monopoly of jobs" (132).

⁸ Despite Spain's neutrality, Catherine Davies notes that the First World War created a rise in prices and increased production, thus "more women were incorporated into the work force. Only 13% of the female population was employed in industry in 1900; by 1930 this figure had grown to 32%" (101). Nash reminds us that during the years surrounding the war (1914-18), "rising inflation led to an enormous deterioration in the standard of living of the Spanish working class... the vital need to contribute to the family wage economy explains the constant offer of female labor in home work and women's acceptance of starvation wages as their only strategy for survival" (*Defying* 27).

⁹ I follow LeGates's definition of western patriarchy in which women were subservient to male authority, and the public-private dichotomy relegated women to the private sphere while allowing men access to the public sphere (13-17). In the Spanish context, Nash notes that the separate spheres dichotomy was in fact upheld by both secular reasoning *and* religious (Catholic) doctrine (*Mujer* 41-43). Given that the Church judged women's wage work as "antinatural y una desvirtuación de su sublime misión de madre y 'ángel del hogar,'" hostility towards women in the workforce was frequent (43).

¹⁰ "Lo que más legitimó el debate ante las aberraciones físicas, sexuales, y psicológicas de la mujer nueva/moderna eran los escritos de los misóginos 'informados': médicos, sociólogas, investigadores, científicos, y pedagogos" (Mangini 99). See Mangini's discussion of "discursos anti-feministas" (97-111) and Scanlon's chapter "Fuentes de autoridad del antifeminismo" (159-94).

identified with first-wave feminism. As a result of this divergence, historians have identified two major strands within the feminist movement at this time – maternal (social) feminism, and liberal (equal-rights) feminism (LeGates 243). While maternal feminists focused on women’s difference by arguing that maternal qualities and instincts ensured vital contributions to society, liberal feminists focused on equal political and legal rights for all human beings, regardless of gender (245). What comes to the fore, then, is a problematic juxtaposition of two very different female identities; a new struggle for power between liberal feminists who wanted freedom and education, and maternal feminists who glorified motherhood and female virtue. In Spain, moreover, the traditional role of wife and mother represented by the *ángel del hogar* was never *entirely* replaced or rejected, even within certain sectors of the feminist movement.¹¹ In fact, this restrictive traditional role re-emerged with new vigor as a romanticized ideal heralded by two diametrically opposing groups. Firstly, conservative maternal feminists touted the virtue of motherhood, care-giving, and self-sacrifice as qualities which would ensure a peaceful future society. Secondly, conservative, patriarchal institutions appropriated those maternal feminist tenets which emphasized the value of the mythical *ángel del hogar*, but for the purpose of restricting women’s access to the public sphere and education. Problematically, many male-dominated institutions were actually able to gain the support of maternal feminists, thus stifling any potential progress as liberal feminists understood it.

While Burgos was rather liberal in her feminist activism, she nevertheless shared many concerns with more conservative maternal feminists. In particular, she found women’s difference, specifically in pregnancy and motherhood, to be an important social factor in determining a woman’s place in an increasingly modern environment. Yet she did not agree with maternal feminists who lauded motherhood and maternal instinct as essential components of a successful society. Instead, she revealed her more liberal ideas in the form of her support for what LeGates categorizes as “voluntary motherhood” (214-16).¹² Since Burgos fought for the edification of women in *all* aspects of society, she promoted an education that would not only prepare women to enter the workforce and gain economic independence, but also enlighten them on the realities of sexual relationships, pregnancy and especially motherhood. For Burgos, the total glorification of motherhood and the *ángel del hogar* only served to prevent women’s emancipation: “Invoca la maternidad para mantener la esclavitud” (*La mujer* 64). She believed modern women should no longer be limited to the traditional roles of wife and mother, and she further rejected the possibility that they be forced into these roles due to economic necessity, naivety, or lack of education. In a revealing 1922 letter to her young friend Rita, the wife of her close friend and poet Rafael Romero, Burgos divulges

¹¹ Nash observes: “En España... la acción de cuestionar el papel tradicional reservado a la mujer es obra de una minoría” (*Mujer* 43).

¹²Feminists supporting “voluntary motherhood” did not dispute its potential desirability, but rather affirmed the “right of women to decide if and when to bear children” (LeGates 241).

quite candid thoughts regarding the prevalent expectation that women must desire to have children above all else:

¡Los hijos! ¿Para qué quiere usted hijos? ... Yo creo... que es traer seres, para perpetuar el dolor. En el amor a los hijos hay un gran egoísmo, del que se vale el instinto de la especie para perpetuarse. Se ha favorecido ese instinto cantando la maternidad, que en el fondo no es más que convertirnos en fábricas de hombres para el trabajo y la guerra o de mujeres para el placer... de los otros. ¿Es demasiado fuerte esto para usted, joven y enamorada, que sueña y no ha sufrido? Quizás, y hago mal en escribírselo. Pero soy sincera. (quoted in Utrera 383)

Rather than celebrate maternal values as the key to a utopian future, as did many first-wave feminists, Burgos championed a feminist position of gender equality in which motherhood and marriage were seen more practically as another set of social institutions into which women should be able to voluntarily enter, or avoid.

In *La rampa*, Burgos portrays motherhood as it is experienced by Isabel, a single, formerly middle-class woman in urban Madrid. Isabel's parents have recently died, and she and her single friend Agueda share a tiny apartment and support themselves by working as vendors in the Bazar.¹³ During the early chapters of the novel, readers observe the two women's daily economic struggle. They work extremely long hours for very little pay, all while enduring constant verbal abuse as they navigate the city's public spaces. Soon, however, the narrator makes Isabel's plight the priority. The protagonist falls in love, learns she is pregnant, and is then shocked when the father of her child, Fernando, becomes angry and will not support her. Due to the increasing physical limitations of her pregnancy, Isabel must give up her job, thus losing her only source of income. To avoid becoming a financial burden to her roommate Agueda, Isabel seeks out Madrid's charitable maternity hospital, the Casa de Maternidad.¹⁴ This particular setting is crucial to the didactic components of the novel. Here, maternity is presented as it is experienced not merely by the individual protagonist, but also by a multitude of diverse Spanish women. Many of the most disturbing, even shocking descriptions of the realities facing single or poor mothers come to light in the chapters detailing life in this institution. Established as a charitable refuge to provide food, shelter and medical care

¹³The Bazar was a "precursor to the modern department store" which dramatically changed the city's commercial landscape (Ugarte 95).

¹⁴Madrid's Casa de Maternidad was established in 1859 by a priest, José María Tenorio, managed by the Hermanas de la Caridad, and capable of housing over 900 women annually (Larson xix). During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a notable increase in charitable hospitals like the Casa de Maternidad in modern Western European cities (Versluisen 19-22). See Margaret Connor Versluisen's study of the "lying-in" hospitals of nineteenth century urban London (18-49), and consult Lara Marks for the social and economic implications of these charitable hospitals and maternity wards (195-244).

for poor mothers, the reality of life in this setting was anything but reposeful. Unlike earlier criticisms of such supposedly benevolent institutions, Burgos does not merely expose a general social malady, but rather she focuses on the explicit victimization of pregnant women within this institution (Ugarte 100).¹⁵

Upon entering the maternity ward, Isabel is confronted with a varied female population that embodies “toda la miseria de la hembra... Eran como despojos míseros de caprichos, arrojadas y despreciadas: piltrafas de mujer” (109). While the principal demographic found in this institution was that of single, poor women, the Casa de Maternidad actually housed a much more heterogeneous group: poor married women; young, single women from wealthy families wishing to conceal their identities to protect their family’s honor; older women dealing with an unexpected pregnancy; even prostitutes. The narrator describes Isabel’s impressions of the group that she soon becomes a part of herself:

...aquel grupo, formado por medio ciento de mujeres marchitas, macilentas, que parecían cansadas de tirar de sus vientres de hidrópicas... Algunas de aquellas mujeres eran casadas, que no contando con medios de asistencia iban allí; pero la mayoría eran las madres solteras, las engañadas, las abandonadas. Había mujeres viejas, reincidentes, que ya había dejado allí varios *críos*, y veían sólo en su maternidad un *accidente físico* desagradable, puramente *mecánico*, del que era preciso salir como de un *tifus*, o una *pulmonía*, sin sentimentalismos de ningún género. (108, my emphasis)

While Isabel enters this social institution as an unwed mother with no financial support from the father of her child, the appearance of married women in the Casa de Maternidad is an important detail brought to light in *La rampa*. Burgos shows her readers that pregnancy, regardless of marital status, can quickly become a severe physical and economic weight for women in modern Madrid.

Additionally, two very telling details emerge from the above passage. First, Burgos’s portrayal of women as victims amidst the miserable conditions of the Casa de Maternidad is reliant on vocabulary that evokes pain, suffering, and illness. The women are consistently described as “engañadas, atropelladas, víctimas, vencidas, pobres, abandonadas, medio muertas, con los cuerpos deformados” (108-118). In this space, the realities of motherhood prove to clash with Isabel’s initial, albeit fleeting, feelings of happiness and satisfaction upon discovering she was pregnant, having accomplished her “misión en la Tierra” (97). Secondly, Burgos’s rendition of the maternal experience relies heavily on a very impersonal, clinical language which had infiltrated and

¹⁵Ugarte cites Galdós’s depiction of the Micaelas Convent in *Fortunata y Jacinta* and Baroja’s critique of the clinic’s treatment of prostitutes as examples in male literary fiction that engaged in the critique of social institutions (100).

progressively come to dominate modern discourses on maternity since the late seventeenth century (Versluysen 20-32).¹⁶ Women in this institution are not depicted as happily awaiting the birth of a beautiful new baby, but rather as suffering from an illness caused by the “pólipo, feto, basura, enfermedad, mancha” or “tumor” stirring within their wombs (123-27). In fact, the words child, son, daughter or baby (*hijo/a, niño/a, bebé*) are virtually absent from the chapters dedicated to the Casa de Maternidad, effectively dehumanizing and devaluing the maternal experience within the walls of this institution. Relying on this very specific vocabulary, Burgos presents young female readers with a very different interpretation of the maternal experience, aiming to educate women on the actual implications of pregnancy in the city.

Burgos continues to reveal these particulars throughout her narrative, especially through Isabel’s scrutiny and reflective commentary regarding the dismal and largely pessimistic atmosphere of life inside the maternity ward. Through Isabel’s eyes, the narrative laments: “La madre tan líricamente cantada aparecía envuelta en toda la realidad de su miseria física y repugnante. Pobres mujeres vejadas, atropelladas, víctimas de deseos innobles, de la brutalidad de los hombres, que las arrojaban lejos de ellos después de la saciedad” (108-09). In the Casa de Maternidad, Isabel is confronted firsthand with a reality that completely destroys any romanticized notion of maternity (and by extension of the *ángel del hogar*) with which she may have been indoctrinated. In fact, ten years after writing *La rampa*, Burgos openly states the importance of disillusioning women of this false depiction of motherhood: “En la teoría todo es elevar la maternidad de una manera lírica, llegando a hacer una cosa semidivina de una función meramente animal, pues el hecho de dar a la luz no constituye un mérito ni una excelcitud” (*La mujer* 217). This is indeed a very candid, perhaps even derogatory depiction of women’s reproductive capacity. However, considering Burgos’s feminist stance (in which women should be considered equals among men in all social sectors), it becomes clear that rather than putting down maternity itself, she is more precisely chastising the conservative ideology which distorts and misrepresents the maternal experience in order to prevent women from taking interest in more public, worldly affairs. Maryellen Bieder summarizes this view as Burgos expresses it in *La mujer moderna y sus derechos*: “Burgos rechaza la exaltación tradicional de la figura femenina como madre, considerando que la idealización de la maternidad no es más que una forma de la esclavitud que niega valor y funciones a las mujeres sin hijos” (235). Burgos also rejects the privileging of maternity on the grounds that it not only subordinates women, but also fosters further inequality in the home: “es absurdo también elevar la maternidad sobre la paternidad. Cualquier

¹⁶Versluysen analyses the “progressive male medical intrusion into birth management” which continued at an accelerated pace, especially after the seventeenth century (22). Though focusing on England, she notes that similar developments in the field took place in other Western European countries (23). She documents the history of English midwifery and its transition from “women’s work” to a male controlled medical profession, and the subsequent change in the language and discourse surrounding childbirth accompanying this evolution (23-34).

desigualdad sea como sea, en el hogar, perjudica a la familia toda" (218). In *La rampa*, Burgos clearly brings these fundamental concerns to the fore of her narrative as a means of educating her readers.

In order to make appropriate decisions regarding courtship, marriage and motherhood, women needed to be pragmatically informed of the realities which often remained camouflaged by much of the antifeminist rhetoric aimed at quelling women's emancipation through the glorification of the *ángel del hogar* (that is, traditional marriage and motherhood). This is particularly relevant to the Casa de Maternidad, as Burgos's largely middle-class reading public had most likely never entered this charitable institution. In fact, the actual geographic location of the maternity ward within Madrid further obscured both the unpleasant aspects of pregnancy, as well as the consequences of what were generally considered immoral sexual relations. Along with the Hospital General and the open-air market El Rastro, the Casa de Maternidad and the attached orphanage (the Inclusa) were strategically grouped together, just outside the busy, ever-transforming and increasingly modern city center.¹⁷ Isabel's gaze is fixed upon the looming presence of this institution as she reluctantly approaches its doors: "parecía que se había agrupado todo hacia aquel lado para limpiar el núcleo dorado de la ciudad de sus miserias, del mismo modo que se arrojan los muertos lejos, a las afueras, para que la vista del Cementerio y sus emanaciones pútridas no conturben ni contaminen a los habitantes" (103). Michel Foucault's notion of the heterotopia can elucidate the significance of this institution's unique spatial position within Madrid. Unlike a utopia, which is a site with no "real place," Foucault asserts that a heterotopia does indeed constitute a real, unique space which can take various forms, reflecting the historical, geographical, and cultural diversity within a given culture (24). As "simultaneously mythic and real contestation[s] of the space in which we live," Foucault divides heterotopias into two categories: the crisis heterotopia and the heterotopia of deviation (24). The former is a privileged or forbidden space reserved for individuals in a state of crisis (adolescents, pregnant women), while the latter accommodates those whose behavior is deviant from the required norm (criminals, mental patients) (24-25). What is illuminating about Burgos's portrayal of the Casa de Maternidad is that it defies unilateral classification as either a heterotopia of crisis or of deviation, and instead uneasily exhibits characteristics of both. As a sacrosanct crisis heterotopia, admitted women are indeed in the "crisis" of pregnancy. Yet it is also a heterotopia of deviation due to the fact that the dominant culture defined single mothers as immoral and dishonorable (that is, as deviants). In fact, Foucault suggests that heterotopias of deviation are progressively replacing crisis heterotopias, thus implying that modern society increasingly regulates and defines what it considers acceptable behavior (25). Burgos makes clear in her novel that the "immoral" behavior of single, pregnant women

¹⁷The Casa de Maternidad was located on the Calle del Mesón de Paredes, south and slightly east of the city center near the area known today as Lavapies ("Historia del Hospital").

was considered a deviation from the required norm of female pre-marital chastity. Yet *La rampa* also suggests that, within the early twentieth-century Spanish capital, pregnancy was also becoming an anomalous state, disassociating and isolating women from their potential involvement in contemporary society due to inevitable economic strain and physical limitations.

Foucault's sixth principle of the heterotopia will more adequately demonstrate the way in which Burgos's depiction of the Casa de Maternidad serves to reinforce the didactic goals of the novel. Since heterotopias function in relation to the surrounding (remaining) space, they are in actuality delineated spaces of otherness. As heterotopias of "compensation," they are as "meticulous" as the remaining space is "messy and ill constructed" (Foucault 27). Correspondingly, critics have pointed out that the scenes depicting the Casa de Maternidad in *La rampa* effectively portray a subculture which functions as a world in itself, a veritable "microcosm of Madrid" (Ugarte 100), or a "microcosmo del mundo femenino" (Larson xix). For example, in the maternity ward, social stratification is clearly visible and meticulously organized. Women like Isabel who cannot afford to pay for their stay are given plain gowns and grouped together as "chicas de bata," while the paying "distinguidas" are housed separately, enjoying privileges denied to their less economically stable counterparts. The "librepensadora" is vocal about these injustices: "A las *chicas de bata* se las trata de cualquier modo... , no son como las que pagan... ¡Valiente caridad!" (110). Yet outside this institution, the same unequal social stratification plagued the city, only with the absence of the mandated uniform dress code and public payments for privileges which existed in the maternity ward.

In addition to the class divisions within the Casa de Maternidad, Burgos also exposes the unfounded moral privileging of maternity within the context of marriage. One married woman in the ward arrogantly belittles the others: "mi hijo no es de *un Juan cualquiera*, y llevará los apellidos de su padre. No tengo una barriga de *extranjis* como esas" (119). Despite being a "chica de bata" and experiencing her pregnancy in the exact same way, she uses her married status to claim moral superiority. Burgos brings society's double-standard surrounding maternity to light through a highly stylized depiction of the inner world of the Casa de Maternidad as a heterotopia of compensation. Yet such hypocrisies were evident in the external city space, and in reality, Burgos was quite aware of these contradictions: "No se compaginan esos cantos a la maternidad, esa protección de que se quiere rodear a la madre, esa exaltación que de ella se hace, con el desprecio a la madre soltera" (*La mujer* 91).¹⁸ Thus, while Burgos provides an objective critique of the Casa de Maternidad and its purportedly benevolent nature, she more importantly presents a symbolic critique of the ("messy and ill-constructed") broader social structures and ideologies which are reflected "meticulously" in this heterotopic

¹⁸Burgos adds: "Resulta además anómalo que se ensalce la maternidad y se veje a la madre que tiene el hijo fuera de matrimonio" (*La mujer* 222).

institution (Foucault 27). Further criticism is directed towards the arrogance and contempt of the nuns, the disturbing lack of cleanliness, the abundance of physical and psychological pain, and the trauma of death and/or separation of mothers and children – each of which undoubtedly existed *outside* the institution, amidst Madrid's chaotic city streets. As a heterotopia, the highly organized, hierarchical structure of this institution reveals what is often ignored within the chaotic city space which surrounds it, exposing the injustice and hypocrisy of a similarly divided modern social landscape. In this instance, Burgos's novel suggests pregnancy has become negatively *redefined* as a debilitating state within both this institution and modern urban society.

While the economic and social implications of pregnancy and motherhood within Madrid was one area in which women like Isabel were in need of education, a second issue that arises is the overall lack of an adequate sexual education. Isabel claims that her decision to engage in a sexual relationship with Fernando is one made by her own free will, as an independent, modern woman. Yet it is apparent that her attitude towards the consequences of sexual activity has been molded not by a sexual education based on scientific or medical facts, but rather on a conservative ideology rooted in patriarchal concern for female honor, sexual purity and repute: "Aunque ella, trabajadora e independiente, tenía ya algo superior de mujer emancipada... no acababa de perder los prejuicios de aquel otro mundo que había sido el suyo, como señorita burguesa y casadera" (84). Further, Isabel's decision is clouded by idealism and shows no evidence of informed, practical thinking, as she never considers the possibility of becoming pregnant. On the contrary, her "rational" thinking merely serves to justify her straying from the antiquated moral ideology based on the virtuous notion of the domestic *ángel del hogar*. In fact, when Isabel falls ill, it is only through another woman's comment that she even entertains the idea that pregnancy could be the cause of her deteriorating health, and she is completely shocked by this suggestion: "Se quedó aterrada ante estas palabras, que eran una revelación" (97).

Isabel is a prime example of a woman who suffers from an insufficient sexual education, another issue which was important to many first-wave-feminists.¹⁹ Throughout *La rampa*, Burgos reveals the way in which much of Madrid's female population was similarly naïve, uneducated, or perhaps entirely oblivious to the real consequences of sexual relations. In the Casa de Maternidad, pregnancy is "un accidente físico desagradable... un descuido" (108). Women are "engañadas" or "abandonadas," finding themselves "otra vez embarazada, sin saber cómo" (119). Only those working closest with the suffering women in the ward realize the errors of a sexual "education" rooted in conservative values of honor and purity based not on medical or scientific facts, but rather on the patriarchal preoccupation with controlling familial honor through female sexuality. The nuns allude to this failure, noting that young mothers in

¹⁹See Ann Taylor Allen for information regarding sex education campaigns in Spain and Western Europe (93-97).

this institution had clearly rejected “ese pudor falso, acomodaticio, que trata de mantener a las vírgenes en la ignorancia de los misterios de la reproducción y hace que se les diga que los niños vienen en cestitas de París o los traen las cigüeñas de un país desconocido” (136). Burgos makes visible the fact that insufficient education, coupled with the conservative and patriarchal promotion of the *ángel del hogar*, debilitated women and contributed to their lack of social consciousness.

In keeping with its didactic nature, *La rampa* further illuminates the enormous physical and psychological tolls of pregnancy, particularly within the urban environment. As Ugarte has observed in his study of *La rampa*, in Isabel’s pregnancy “the city’s harms are now physical as well as psychological” (100). As an “enfermedad,” pregnancy is shown to disable and even attack the female body. In addition to the grotesque depictions of the women in the Casa de Maternidad, the maternal transformation of Isabel’s body is also presented to the reader. Before entering the maternity ward, Isabel catches a glimpse of herself in a shop window: “Su cuerpo era sólo un enorme vientre, sostenido por las piernas, que parecían más cortas y débiles” (104). In fact, Isabel initially fails to recognize her distorted self in this “other” reflecting back at her:

¿Era ella aquella mujer flácida, de facciones abultadas, hinchadas, en medio de su demacración, con el rostro cansado, caído; cubiertas las mejillas por el paño amarillento que parecía también velarle los ojos, dándole esa expresión peculiar de las embarazadas; esa mirada opaca que parece convertir sus pupilas en los cristales de unos lentes a través de los cuales quisieran ver otros ojos? (104)

Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection can shed light here on Burgos’s representation of the peculiarities of Isabel’s physical and psychological transformations during pregnancy. According to Kristeva, the abject is an indefinable “other” that besets the subject, that “lies outside... And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master” (1-2). Its presence effectively interrogates the identity of the subject (the “I”), haunting it with a “vortex of summons and repulsion” that confuse and transgress the boundaries which this subject has set in place as a means of self-definition (1-2). Despite such agitation, the subject continues to endure this abject, this non-object, because it imagines it to be the desire of this “other” (2). As Kristeva explains it: “A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been... now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing” (2).

Kristeva’s concept of the abject offers a wide range of interpretations regarding the boundaries and definitions of self and other, but it is particularly useful in analyzing Isabel’s concept of self, both before and after childbirth. As a Kristevan subject, Isabel experienced a sense of repulsion at the eerie way in which she no longer recognized her own image during pregnancy, yet upon giving birth to her daughter she notices a strange

physical void: “¿Y su barriga? No se había dado bien cuenta de que no tenía su barriga. Se encontraba vacía, alisada... un hueco” (142). For Isabel, both her pregnant body and the child growing within her womb are, and were, conceived as abject entities: separate and loathsome to some degree, and yet simultaneously familiar “others” within the self. By detailing these paradoxical sentiments, Burgos makes clear the way in which the pregnant body and fetus both (re)define and destabilize a woman’s concept of self as they actively remap her corporal and psychological boundaries. Moreover, for a working-class woman like Isabel in urban Madrid, the abject experience of pregnancy (re)assigns her position within the city’s spaces.

The principles of abjection are further applicable to the general description of the maternal experience as it develops within the confines of the Casa de Maternidad, especially given the institution’s clinical atmosphere. Kristeva explains that refuse, uncleanliness, and especially corpses, represent the utmost of abjection because they do not respect boundaries – they encroach upon everything, breaking down borders until no meaning remains (3-4). She describes the corpse, for example, as “death infecting life... It is something rejected from which one does not part from which one does not protect oneself as from an object” (4). In *La rampa*, a stomach-turning description of the misery endured during childbirth presents the reader with vivid and execrable imagery of motherhood which clearly evokes Kristeva’s description of the abject:

Llegaban allí las embarazadas que sufrían hijos, hemorragias, erupciones y males de boca, de ojos; enfermedades que atacaban al feto... Había que operar todos los días quistes, tumores, cánceres [sic]. Siempre el bisturí cortando carne. Se tiraban cubetas enteras de sangre y pus, y quedaban amontonadas en un barreño las piltrafas, como entrañas palpitantes y sanguinolentas. (126)

This sight is immediately described as an “espectáculo de dolor y de suciedad,” with pregnant women passing through this operating room in vegetative, unresponsive states (126). Later, as Isabel prepares to leave the ward, the narrator summarizes the grotesque conditions in similar terms: “Era un espectáculo doloroso y repugnante al mismo tiempo el contemplar toda la suciedad y todo el agobio de la maternidad” (141).

The repeated use of the word “spectacle” emphasizes the paradoxical sentiments of repulsion and uncanny attraction which underlie one’s experience of the abject. In the ward, new life enters the world amidst a potentially life-threatening atmosphere, as *La rampa* depicts an environment in which the medical facilities and instruments can actually contribute to the spread of disease among women: “Era necesario toda la escrupulosa limpieza y vigilancia de los médicos para evitar la propogación de enfermedades y terribles contagios” (126). Again, Kristeva elucidates that it is not “lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between,

the ambiguous, the composite" (4). With this language, Burgos presents pregnancy, maternity and even motherhood as abject entities, challenging, threatening and redefining the female self: first within the ward, and again in the broader urban landscape reflected in this heterotopic institution. In fact, recalling the ambiguous, dual role of the Casa de Maternidad as both a deviation and a crisis heterotopia, situated both within the city yet separate from it, it seems that the very presence of this institution actually disturbs attempts to order the chaotic urban society. In this environment, pregnancy, maternity and motherhood become unsettling, as they make visible patriarchal hypocrisy and destabilize the legitimacy of patriarchal discourses. The arbitrary distinctions between what Spanish culture considered a natural, desirable female condition for the upper or middle class *ángel del hogar*, and a repugnant, detestable inconvenience for the single, working class woman, now become palpable.

Just as her pregnancy was drastically different than what a former *señorita burguesa* like Isabel would have anticipated, so too is her ensuing experience as a mother. Facing the challenges of motherhood, Isabel is instantly aware of "el eterno problema de la mujer, el problema de su hijo" (99). Readers are shown the reality of bringing a child into the world: "antes había experimentado todo el dolor y la miseria de la maternidad física, ahora sufría todo el dolor y el desencanto de su maternidad moral. La sentía pesar sobre ella, imponiéndole las más duras obligaciones, y *esclavizándola* por un sentimentalismo del que no se podía liberar" (135). Burgos's repeated use of the word "esclavizar" is crucial to the didactic aim of the novel. For all intents and purposes, Isabel now enters into another form of social bondage. In the novel, the Casa de Maternidad discourages women from leaving their children in the orphanage, the *Inclusa*, upon discharge.²⁰ Unfortunately, given the limited financial resources available to these women, if they choose to keep their child their only recourse is often to find the father in hopes of receiving financial support. In actuality, some women in the institution harbor even higher aspirations: "Unas tenían esperanza, llevándose al hijo, de conmovier al padre y llegar hasta a casarse" (117). While considered an adequate plan for some women in the institution, and certainly preferable single motherhood, this option too is demystified in *La rampa*.

Following a large ellipsis in the narration, the following chapter begins with Isabel, her daughter Fernandita, and Fernando in a domestic setting. Readers learn that Agueda had arranged to reunite the former lovers. But despite the initial portrait of domestic bliss, Isabel soon learns that motherhood and domestic life do not live up to the ideal lauded by conservative institutions such as the Casa de Maternidad. Much like during her pregnancy, Isabel is quickly disillusioned, explaining to Agueda: "Ahora que he llegado a conseguir casi toda la felicidad que puede tener una mujer, cuando he

²⁰"[T]rataban de encariñarlas con sus hijos, hacienda que les dieran el pecho; procuraban que sintieran el impulso de no abandonarlos, obligándoles a entregarlos ellas; pero no se cuidaba de proteger a la madre deseosa de conservarlos, y que tenía que doblegarse ante la pobreza y la falta de medios de vida" (42).

logrado lo que me parecía un imposible, es cuando me encuentro más desgraciada, más sola" (147). This reality of motherhood requires a drastic rewriting of her initial feelings of optimistic "alegría" upon learning she was pregnant: "Ahora, sentía el vacío de su falta de independencia, de su servidumbre, de su desigualdad respecto a Fernando" (147). Even more, Isabel senses her enslavement not merely inside her home, but also in public spaces. In the clinic (another modern institution where misery and uncertainty prevailed) with her sick daughter, she observes: "Se veía allí el calvario de la madre. La servidumbre y la tristeza de la maternidad. Los padres no iban nunca. Eran ellas, las pobres mujeres, las que soportaban todo el fardo de los dolores" (154). Her child's very existence functions as a tangible representation of her unfavorable social position: "El hijo era como una huella, una marca de esclavitud que él había puesto sobre su cuerpo" (148). Agueda makes this clear to Isabel when discussing their strained friendship: "Tú ya no eres libre como antes" (157). As the *ángel del hogar*, Isabel gives up her main sources of external support: "No había ido Agueda ni ninguna de sus antiguas amigas... ni ninguna de sus conocidas la trataban ya desde que vivía con Fernando" (180).

Finally, the tragic death of Fernandita shatters Isabel's illusions, causing her to finally accept that Fernando no longer loves her.²¹ The protagonist is rendered helpless and, despite her "deseo de huir, de escapar de allí," she knows that she has nowhere to go and no means to support herself (182). In the end, it is Fernando who flees, leaving only a letter and some spare change. Burgos exposes this double standard through the narrator's subtle, sarcastic commentary: "Se creía así un perfecto caballero que podía vanagloriar de su conducta" (182). Having lost her job and suffered through pregnancy, childbirth, motherhood, the death of her child, and finally a failed relationship, Isabel is left abandoned and alone. The total lack of final catharsis in the novel is crucial. That is, while *La rampa* exhibits many characteristics of the *bildungsroman*, the ending offers no hope for the protagonist's successful (re)integration into modern society. On the contrary, Burgos's Isabel finally enters yet *another* institution for women, the Colegio de Criadas, a "prisión disimulada, un purgatorio, una casa gris" (205-06).²² Through the life experiences of this unfortunate protagonist, Burgos creates a learning opportunity for young female readers who may aspire to emulate or fulfill the falsely glorified concept of maternal and domestic bliss painted by the patriarchal rhetoric informing the *ángel del hogar*.

In the end, the crude realities of motherhood drawn in *La rampa* function not only as a creative means for Burgos to explore her own feminist ideology, but also as a way of educating a growing urban female population on how city life could restrict and abuse women – particularly mothers – of all ages and social classes. In *La mujer moderna*,

²¹"Se había ido algo de los dos, lo que los ligaba, lo que los mantenía unidos. Veían bien claro que ya no se amaban en sí" (182).

²²In contrast to *bildungsromans*, fairy tales or romances, *La rampa's* final lines read: "Había llegado al final de la rampa. No sentía la violencia del ir cayendo. Estaba en el fin, en el extremo, en el momento de poderse sentar, aunque definitivamente vencida" (207).

Burgos states clearly that a modern feminist woman must be “[una mujer] respetada, *consciente*, con personalidad, con responsabilidad, con derechos, que no se oponen al amor, al hogar y a la maternidad” (70, my emphasis). She defines the “mujer inconsciente” as a woman “sin concepto de su esclavitud, que está abandonada en una casa que no merece el nombre de hogar, vituperada por el marido, fracasada en todas sus ilusiones” (92). For Burgos, a modern feminist must gain consciousness of her social surroundings and situation through an education which will prepare her to become more than solely a wife and mother. In fact, as early as 1900 Burgos expressed her preoccupation with the insufficient education afforded to young Spanish women, underscoring advanced opportunities available in other countries which prepared women for a variety of professions, while lamenting that in Spain “la mujer no tiene más carrera que el matrimonio” (“La educación” 70-71). Seventeen years later in *La rampa*, Burgos criticizes and demystifies the idealized social roles of wife and mother, largely in response to the dominant patriarchal ideology which, aiming to quell the burgeoning feminist movement in Spain, continued to evoke these traditional “careers” as the epitome of feminine honor and virtue.²³ The oppressive nature of these roles is brought to light through Isabel’s pregnancy, first in her experience in the Casa de Maternidad, and then as the *ángel del hogar* after the birth of her child. In accordance with *La rampa*’s educational potential, the didactic value proves to be twofold. On the one hand, it presents a cautionary narrative of the city’s ills through the struggles of a defeated, ultimately disillusioned heroine who falls to the bottom of Madrid’s metaphorical “rampa.” And on the other hand, the novel provides a powerful counter-discourse to combat the anti-feminist rhetoric aiming to elevate the traditional *ángel del hogar* to a virtual fairy-tale reality.

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²³Of course Burgos’s mission did not end after *La rampa*. In *La mujer moderna* she elaborates: “En la teoría se enaltece así la función maternal para animar a la mujer... se la encadena en la práctica, a lo que pudiera llamarse *maternidad obligatoria*. Se invoca la maternidad como uno de los motivos que deben retenerla en el hogar apartada de toda otra actividad, como si el papel exclusivo de la mujer fuese el de madre y esposa” (219).

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