

HOMOSOCIAL DESIRE AND HOMOSEXUAL PANIC IN *LO PROHIBIDO*

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Lo prohibido (1884) has been labeled by some critics one of Benito Pérez Galdós's weakest novels. The late Stephen Gilman memorably wrote that the narrator, Jose María Bueno de Guzmán, is a "trivial Naturalistic rake" who has no conceivable reason for confessing his secrets and telling his tale (142-144), and it is this view which has largely shaped critical consensus about this novel.¹ Recently, however, there has been a renewal of interest in this novel on the part of critics who see it as more complex than previously recognized. These critics' analyses frequently touch on the novel's incoherencies, such as the unreliability of the first-person narrator, the complication of Ido del Sagrario as the actual writer of the memoir, and the lack of apparently stable male and female identities,² which has prompted critics to explore in *Lo prohibido* the limits and borders of gender and sexuality. For example, Akiko Tsuchiya very perceptively describes the novel as challenging "[...] culturally generated categories of gender and sexuality, and, ultimately, any notion of coherent subjectivity" (281). The studies noted have generally interpreted the first-person narrator, José María, as an example of the perceived blurring of the boundaries between genders during the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Spain. These same studies have generally focused attention on José María's heterosexual adulterous relationships with his female cousins: Eloísa, María Juana, and Camila.

This essay argues that the exploration of limits and borders in *Lo prohibido* ultimately questions heterosexual normativity by examining José María's homosocial relationships with the cuckolded husbands.³ My reading of *Lo prohibido* shifts the traditional critical emphasis from male-female adultery in the novel to the structure of male-male relations portrayed. This essay argues that *Lo prohibido* participates in this symbolic economy of desire, and, in the process, destabilizes the heterosexual norm by "queering" sexual normativity and thus any sort of "natural" sexuality.⁴ This essay will ultimately affirm that *Lo prohibido* represents a moment in which a male homoerotic identity is postulated and, in the moment of its possibility, is immediately repudiated. I am not saying that an identifiable homosexual identity in the modern (present-day) sense existed at this particular historical moment.⁵ Rather, this reading focuses on the moments in the text in which the object of desire (for José María) switches from female to male, thus exposing slippages between sex, gender and desire. This is visible at the narrative level as well, especially in the play of binary terms, which to a large extent govern the text. These terms—known/unknown, secrecy/disclosure, and public/private—are indicative of the mechanism by which the possibility for a "queer" sexuality becomes visible at this time in this text. It is this possibility which is foreclosed at the end of the text and which I label homosexual panic.⁶

Before delving into a reading of *Lo prohibido*, it may be useful to look at the state of queer studies regarding nineteenth-century Spain. Queer studies, as Annamarie Jagose has

summarized, “[...] describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender, and sexual desire” (3). Feminist critics, especially, have called attention to gender and sexuality in the Spanish nineteenth-century novel, but, to date, there have only been a handful of texts that have considered questions of homosociality and same-sex desire at all in this period. There are collections of essays, such as the one edited by Chávez-Silverman and Hernández, *Reading and Writing the Ambiente*, or *¿Entiendes? Queer Readings, Hispanic Writings*, edited by Berman and Smith, that have one or two articles on the nineteenth century, but none specifically on male homoerotic desire in nineteenth-century Spain. Most work has concentrated either on early modern Spain or on the twentieth century, especially post-Franco cultural configurations of desire.⁷ Notable exceptions of historically-based studies are Francisco Vázquez García and Andrés Moreno Mengíbar’s *Sexo y razón*, which takes as its project the tracing of an admittedly Foucauldian genealogy of sexuality in Spain, and in doing so devotes an extensive section to the nineteenth century, and Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García’s monograph *Los invisibles: A History of Male Homosexuality in Spain, 1850-1940*. The latter is the only study to date, to my knowledge, that concentrates on male homosexuality in late nineteenth-century Spain. More work remains to be done on literature, especially since literary critics have worked productively to make visible gender and sex roles in this period. It is in this regard that examining Galdós’s novels from a queer theory perspective may turn out to be especially useful.

Most criticism about *Lo prohibido* centers on the subject in the novel, the narrator-protagonist, José María Bueno de Guzmán.⁸ He has been interpreted in multiple ways: as a male hysteric, a feminized man, or as a character who reflects contemporary degeneracy theories concerning men. These critical interpretations have taken the instability of the gendered subject as a given by noting the ways in which gender roles seem to blend and blur, especially evident regarding José María. Bridget Aldaraca and Donna McGiboney coincide in naming José María Guzmán a male hysteric.⁹ Lou Charnon-Deutsch sees José María as becoming a “woman, a copy of the biologically gendered female hysterics [...] feminized [...]” by the end of the text (179). Jo Labanyi argues that José María suffers not from hysteria, but from neurasthenia: “the ‘overtaxing’ [...] of the nervous system by the excessive stimulation of modern city life” (133). Of the critics who have analyzed the subject in *Lo prohibido*, Akiko Tsuchiya comes the closest to arguing that this novel challenges the heterosexual norm. She argues that *Lo prohibido* “deconstructs the dominant phallogocentric discourses of the period and anticipates the postmodern interrogation of the subject [...],” thus ultimately questioning the “instability of the sexed/gendered subject” (281). What Tsuchiya analyzes is José María’s instability as a gendered (masculine) subject and the ultimate “androgyny of the text,” which, she argues, is caused by the dissolution of the subject’s identity into androgyny (287). All of these interpretations assume the protagonist’s heterosexuality, and indeed, the plot revolves around José María’s adulterous relationships with his cousins. This has led to general agreement that the adultery is what is ostensibly “prohibited,” and so critical analyses have focused solely on the heterosexual

relationships in the novel.

In fact, the relationships with the husbands are a considerable part of *Lo prohibido*, which are described concurrently with the heterosexual plot. The most important homosocial bonds in the text are the relationship with Carrillo, described at the beginning of the novel after José María has seduced Eloísa; and the relationship with Constantino, described during the second part of the novel. Several critics have commented briefly on the hostility-attraction pattern present in the novel, especially regarding Carrillo and Constantino. Whiston remarks:

[i]nteresa notar que José María sólo le habla detenidamente a Carrillo después de sus amores con Eloísa [...] Sus instintos de competitividad – comercial, sexual, social – le impiden ver en Carrillo a un posible amigo verdadero. Lo mismo ocurre a lo largo de casi toda la segunda parte en sus relaciones con Constantino [...]. (“Introducción” 21)

Scanlon also sees this pattern in José María’s relationships with Carrillo and Constantino (838).¹⁰ Sylvia Tubert, in an essay describing the psychology of eroticism in *Lo prohibido*, comments suggestively that “se puede apreciar que para José María no sólo es necesaria la existencia de un tercero perjudicado, sino que ese tercero, encarnado por el marido de cada una de sus primas, pasa a ser objeto de un intenso interés y de sentimientos marcadamente ambivalentes” (205). Aside from noticing said pattern, there has not been a full analysis of these relationships, even though they are acknowledged to be an important part of the plot.

It is in the analysis of these male-male relationships that Eve Sedgwick’s idea of male homosocial desire is useful. It describes the continuum of male-male relationships, from friendship to genital homosexuality. Desire, in this context, is “the affective or social force, the ‘glue,’ even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship” (*Between Men* 2). It plays a significant role in the homosocial-homosexual continuum; as Sedgwick notes: “To draw the homosocial back into the orbit of “desire,” of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual” (1). The idea of the Girardian triangle that informs Sedgwick’s text uses “desire” to describe not only the traditional heterosexual plot of male-female relationships, but also to describe the link that binds the two male rivals in the erotic triangle.¹¹

Sedgwick suggests that the most important component of any erotic triangle is in fact the rivalry for the object of desire, not the bond between the pursuer and the beloved. It is the bond this rivalry uncovers which structures the triangle: “[this] bond between rivals in an erotic triangle [is ...] even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved” (*Between Men* 21). The homosocial bond between men illustrated by the erotic triangle explains in a crude but effective way the workings of patriarchy: as Gayle Rubin has noted, patriarchy primarily is the “exchange of women” for the purposes of cementing bonds between men (175).

In narrative, homosocial desire manifests itself when the plot focus shifts from the

heterosexual triangle to the bond between the rivals. In these bonds “are concentrated the fantasy energies of compulsion, prohibition, and explosive violence [...] At the same time, these fantasy energies are mapped along the axes of social and political power [...]” (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 162). In *Lo prohibido* the relationship between homosocial desire and patriarchal power can be seen in the text where the language of desire emerges in moments which are presented to the reader as supposedly heterosexual, in other words, when the narrative focus slips and concentrates on the bonds between José María and the other men. The bonds between men in the novel map out precisely along the fault lines of class and economic power, especially important in this text.

Lo prohibido, more so than other novels in Galdós’s “novelas contemporaneas” series, portrays the “locura crematística” of the 1880’s. Money is one of the main signifiers of the novel: it is a source of power, an indicator of consumption, and also a marker of desire between José María and others in the novel. As many critics have pointed out, money governs all social relationships in this novel.¹² This association between money and desire is also seen in the representation of José María’s body—illness and impotence follow each of his illicit sexual encounters. In fact, it is José María’s financial excesses which bring about his downfall, suggesting a link between the representation of the body and money (Labanyi 132).

It is around money and consumption that a defining structure of the novel becomes obvious: the oppositions made between the terms secrecy/disclosure, public/private, and known/unknown. For example, José María’s fortune is the main discourse in Eloísa’s seduction; likewise he uses gifts (money) to “silence” the family about their affair. The “open” secret throughout much of the first half is that Eloísa is José María’s lover, but the real “secret” is the affection José María begins to feel for Carrillo. And in the second half of the novel, José María’s “secret” pursuit of Camila parallels his “secret” hatred of Constantino, which contrasts with his openly “disclosed” feelings of affection/love towards Constantino at the end of the novel. Again, both of these relationships are marked by money: José María showers Eloísa with money and gifts; conversely, both Camila and Constantino make a point to refuse the majority of the gifts that José María tries to give them, the only characters to do so in the text.

The binary terms singled out here—secrecy/disclosure, public/private, and known/unknown—are not in play by accident. Rather, they are epistemologically marked by the “historical specificity of homosocial/ homosexual definition” which is present in most Western cultures from the second half of the nineteenth century (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 72-73). More than just sex being the “secret,” it was knowledge of same-sex desire which was the “secret”:

same-sex desire [...] was repressed with increasing energy, and hence increasing visibility, as the nineteenth-century culture of the individual proceeded to elaborate a version of knowledge/sexuality increasingly structured by its pointed cognitive refusal of sexuality between women, between men. (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 73)

The instability and the struggles for meaning of these binaries, Sedgwick argues, become increasingly fused with one particular subject: the homosexual (74).¹³

An example of the fundamental importance of these binaries to the structure of the novel and to its interrogation of sexuality can be seen in the narrative premise of the text, which is introduced in the second volume.¹⁴ José María's purpose in writing the memoir is not only to engage in a pastime, but also to produce a confession and a guide for others in similar circumstances:

Proponíame hacer un esfuerzo de sinceridad y contar todo como realmente era, sin esconder ni disimular lo desfavorable, ni omitir nada, pues así podía ser mi confesión, no sólo provechosa para mí, sino también para los demás, de modo que los reflejos de mi conciencia a mí me iluminaran, y algo de claridad echasen también sobre los que se vieran en situación semejante a la mía. (285)

Confession, as Foucault has argued, is the production of truth implicated in relations of power (60). The sexual is produced as the topic for the confession and so "sex is transformed into discourse" (61). But it also has another purpose. Not only is the confessional bound up in the sexual, but it is involved in the production of the subject; in other words, "knowledge of the subject" is tied up with knowledge of the sexual (70). It is a process in which the sexual is made "an index to character" and in which people are read as unique subjects—individuals—because of this knowledge (Tambling 2). Hence, confession (the "unknown") is what becomes "known." If the production of truth is confession's ultimate product, then the "truth" (or what becomes known) of this particular narrative is not revealing the adulterous relationships with the female cousins (which is, after all, known by both the reader and other characters in the text), but rather revealing the "unknown" truth of José María's relationships with men.

However, as others have rightly pointed out, the narrative premise itself is complicated by the fact that it is not José María who ultimately writes and organizes his memoirs, but rather Ido del Sagrario. Ido's contributions are never specified, although there are references to his significant role in the writing of the manuscript (482). Ido's background as a folletín writer invariably influences his abilities as a scribe—José María continually reassures the reader about the truthfulness of his narrative—nonetheless, doubt is cast on the text when we read passages such as this one (cited in Willem 195):

con sólo mirarme adivinábame los pensamientos. Tal traza al fin se daba, que contándole yo un caso de dos docenas de palabras, lo ponía en escritura con tanta propiedad, exactitud y colorido, que no lo hiciera mejor yo mismo, narrador y agente al propio tiempo de los sucesos. (482)

The question of who is the actual writer of the memoir throws doubt on the whole enterprise and on the validity or reliability of the confession itself. The multiplicity of the assumptions involved (the reader believes that José María is writing his memoirs—an attribution mentioned several times by the narrator himself—until it is revealed at the end that Ido in fact has organized and probably written most, if not all, the memoir) serve as

an example of the discursive incoherence at the root of these structuring binaries. These instabilities at the narrative level mirror what is happening at another level in the text—the subject's sexual object of desire.

Desire and male bonds

Economic power and class position structure the bonds between men and form the paths for male entitlement in this novel. As mentioned earlier, money governs social relationships, especially between men. In fact, this is important to understanding why certain relationships are featured more prominently than others. José María's seduction of Maria Juana and consequently his rivalry with her husband Medina do not receive nearly the amount of attention that the other two seductions do, and that can be attributed to both economic and class similarities between Medina and José María. In contrast, Carrillo, a poor aristocrat, and Constantino, part of the petty bourgeoisie and also relatively poor, are both in different socio-economic class positions from José María, and receive much more attention at the narrative level.

Medina is part of the financial bourgeoisie, like José María, and is his financial and social equal: he also deals with finance and money, albeit in a more prudent and fiscally responsible manner. Both men are part of the "burguesía de negocios," that sector of society which became financially and socially important during the Restoration (Scanlon 837). In fact, as José María enumerates his fortune at the beginning of the novel, he is not only recounting for us his investments and the money he made in the sale of his business, but also identifying himself as part of this sector of the bourgeoisie (68-69).

However, this is where the similarities between the two end. The involvement in financial affairs by most of the men is also marked by a corresponding restriction to be prudent when it comes to money, a common theme found in many different nineteenth-century cultural discourses. The use of economic language in medical and other discourses was a phenomenon common in nineteenth-century Europe, and Spain was no exception. The body was symbolically seen as an economy, and over-expenditure of "resources" (especially sexual energy) was perceived to be detrimental to men's health (Labanyi 132-33). Accordingly, and conversely, economic over-expenditure was also seen as negative, because it reflected physical "degeneration" (Labanyi 132-33).¹⁵ José María is able to manage his fortune until close to the end when his excesses land him in financial (and physical) ruin; Carrillo is never able to establish a budget for his household and his inheritance disappears almost as soon as he inherits it. Notably, Medina is shrewd and thrifty when it comes to money, displaying bourgeois values of good economic management, almost to the point of avarice: "[Los Medinas] [g]astaban mucho menos de lo que tenían, y no se señalaban por su generosidad. Así llegó la malicia a tacharlos de sordidez y del prurito de alambicar, apurar y retorcer demasiadamente los números" (60). When José María squanders his fortune at the end it is Medina who reprimands his spendthrift ways, and in his reprimand he links the idea of masculine control over money with being able to

control one's (masculine) sexual impulses: "Eso es el resultado de dejarse dominar por las pasiones y los apetitos, en vez de vencerlos, como hace toda persona que merece el nombre de varón" (460). Implied in this judgment is that if one does not show any control over money, one does not deserve to be called a man, implicitly invoking the nineteenth-century idea that uncontrolled spending is solely a feminine vice.¹⁶ In contrast with the other husbands in the text, Medina is the only one who shows control, financially and otherwise.

José María's considerable fortune and his position in the financial bourgeoisie inform the dynamics of subordination and domination on the social level, which play out fully in both of the relationships with Carrillo and Constantino. In Eloísa's case it is his fortune which enables him to seduce her under Carrillo's nose; in Constantino's case, José María is clearly richer and is able to spend money on gifts for the Miquis which they would not otherwise be able to afford. Unlike Carrillo and Constantino, Medina is the only husband whose financial status makes him invulnerable to José María's fortune.

The first part of the novel describes José María's seduction and conquest of Eloísa. It also describes his relationship with Carrillo. Part of the aristocracy, Carrillo nonetheless is poor due to excessive spending. When they inherit money from his aunt, both he and Eloísa spend so much that they constantly teeter on the brink of disaster: she buys objects for the house and clothes, and he spends money on philanthropic projects, emblematic of unproductive capital. Carrillo is also sickly and weak; Eloísa anticipates his death so that she can become José María's wife (148). The narrator's relationship with Carrillo is, at first, narrated as the rivalry between husband and lover: "¿Valía Carrillo más que yo? ¿Valía yo más que él?" (104). As José María realizes that he may succeed at seducing Eloísa, he questions her choice of a husband (104). He also begins to question his masculinity in comparison with Carrillo (Aldaraca 198-99). However, even during the time right before the beginning of the affair with Eloísa, ambivalent feelings are present. José María's opinion of Carrillo is always more favorable than others' opinions: "Para mayor desgracia mía, cuando movido de un cierto espíritu de reparación, le consideraba yo adornado de grandes méritos y, por ende superior a mí por los cuatro costados, los demás se inclinaban a la opinión contraria [...]" (104).

In the chapter titled "Carrillo valía más que yo" José María's feelings of guilt over the affair translate to a growing bond between Carrillo and José María, fraught with indicators of homosocial desire and thus presented in terms of a moral aberration:

Fáltame contar lo más importante, lo más extraordinario y anómalo en el carácter de aquel hombre. Lo que voy a decir era una aberración moral, indefinible excepción de cuanto han instituido la Naturaleza y la sociedad, pero tan cierto, tan evidente como es sol este que me alumbraba. Carrillo me mostraba un afecto cordial [...] Ignoro por qué me quería tanto Carrillo [...]. (147)

He goes on to suggest that he does not know why Carrillo likes him: "No sé si agradecía su estimación o si me repugnaba; no sé si me apoyaba en ella como una salvaguardia de mi falta, o si la maldecía como indigna de los dos, y como si a entrambos

nos degradara de la misma manera” (147). Ostensibly he is describing his guilt in befriending Carrillo while he is having an affair with Eloísa, but in fact, he does know at least one reason why Carrillo likes him: they are similar in the way they spend money, although the reasons why may be completely different. Carrillo spends foolishly and beyond his means on philanthropic projects, while José María is the ultimate consumer and spends lavishly, and ultimately goes bankrupt as well.

What is also clear in this passage is that his ambivalence, and thus the play between “I know why” and “I don’t know why,” is another way for the narrator to approach the idea of a bond between men. The idea of “degradar” is used in combination with “estimación” in the previous example—opposite terms which give an overlay of shame to the relationship. Immediately following this he describes for the reader their long talks:

¡Cuántas veces, después de una crisis de dolores horribles [...] no tenía el infeliz otro consuelo que conversar conmigo de aquellas cosas tan de su gusto! Su mano en mi mano, sus ojos en mi cara, hacíame preguntas, y jamás se hartaba de mis respuestas. Yo hacía un gran sacrificio de tiempo y de humor para agradarle, y me estaba las horas muertas, charla que te charla [...]. (147)

In this and the preceding quote the intensity of the homosocial bond between José María and Carrillo is unmistakable. The ambivalence presented by the narrator is again a play on what is known and what is unknown—it is plausible to suggest that in this case it marks and/or masks desire, potentially erotic, between two men.

The play between what is known and unknown is also seen in other relationships: for example, Carrillo does not know that José María is having an affair with his wife, while everyone else has this knowledge. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, Eloísa’s and José María’s affair is bound up within the parameters of secrecy/disclosure. He frets about not being able to tell anyone about the affair: “No quería yo el escándalo [...] la publicidad érame antipática; pero, con todo, mi aventura me ahogaba, hichándome el pecho [...] Érame forzoso mostrar a alguien mis bien ganados laureles; yo buscaba tal vez, sin darme cuenta de ello, un aplauso a la secreta aventura” (131). Of course, he very quickly finds out that his affair is anything but a secret for many people: “Dos meses después advertí que mi secreto había dejado de serlo para muchas personas [...]” (132).

Carrillo’s physical decline is rapid and precipitous. He is unable to eat, as the illness that is slowly killing him keeps him away from Eloísa’s Thursday dinners. During one of the worst attacks, guests continue to eat while Carrillo is throwing up blood in the next room (178). As Carrillo is in his death throes, he grabs José María in a tight hug from which he has difficulty extricating himself:

Cuando Celedonio y yo nos quedamos solos con el moribundo, éste me echó los brazos, uno al cuello, otro por delante del pecho, y apretóme tan fuerte que me sentí mal [...] Costóme trabajo desasirme del brazo de aquel inocente que quería sin duda llevarme consigo al Limbo. (222)

This veritable death grip marks the beginning of increased intensity in bodily contact in the

second half of the novel, where José María and Constantino are repeatedly engaging in some sort of violent physical play.

José María's rivalry with Constantino is the other important homosocial relationship in the text. The narrator spends a more time describing his efforts at seducing Camila, and thus, his efforts at getting Constantino out of the way. In fact, the entire second half of the novel is dedicated to describing the attempted seduction of Camila by Jose María. When he describes Constantino, only the worst epithets seem fit to describe him. He calls him "feo, torpe, desmañado, grosero, puerco, holgazán, vicioso, pendenciero, brutal" (66). The Miquis marriage would seem to be tailor-made for both Constantino and Camila—they are both described as exceedingly healthy, and physically and mentally strong: a striking contrast to the decadent bourgeois society described in the novel and especially to José María.¹⁷

José María devotes a lot of time to describing Constantino's body, which makes these descriptions markers of homoerotic desire. In fact, the characterization of Constantino is based mostly on the descriptions of his body. For example, a portrait of a half-naked Constantino hangs in the young couple's home. Disgust, jealousy and admiration are present in the words José María uses to deride the portrait: "Tienes un gusto perverso. Es que da asco ver ahí ese zángano de circo enseñando sus bellas formas, con esos brazos de mozo de cordel y esa cabeza de bruto" (242). As Stallybrass and White point out "disgust always bears the imprint of desire [...]" (191), and this is borne out by José María's ambivalent feelings towards the portrait—evident in the juxtaposition of "bellas formas" with "brazos de mozo de cordel" and "cabeza de bruto"—and thus the object of said portrait. José María does express admiration for Constantino's physical prowess, but it is always ambivalent. While he may use derogatory or disparaging terms, there is always an element of admiration in them as well: "En los asaltos en que Constantino y yo nos entreteníamos por las tardes, aquel pedazo de bárbaro llevaba la mejor parte. Tenía más destreza que yo, muchísima más fuerza y un brazo de acero. Su agilidad y fuerza me pasmaban" (244). Constantino is energetic, healthy, strong, and faithful to his wife; there is an implicit contrast throughout the novel with José María, who is weak, constantly ill, and a philanderer.

The vacation to San Sebastian, planned by José María to get Camila alone, underscores and reveals José María's feelings towards Constantino. Significantly, it is here that he begins to write his self-professed "confession," writing that his aim is to "uncover" or disclose the "truth" about events and people: "di a conocer el pueril entusiasmo, el desatino con que me representaba todas las cosas, viéndolas distintas de como efectivamente eran; y poco a poco las fui trayendo a su ser natural, descubriendo su formación íntima conforme los hechos las iban descarnando" (285). It is telling that he starts his "confession" right before describing the vacation in San Sebastian, as it is here that the homosocial relationship between José María and Constantino is marked by explosive physical violence and by a peculiar way of explaining his feelings: while he writes about feelings of hostility towards Constantino, it becomes evident that the text reflects a marked ambivalence in José María's feelings, and that every opportunity of physical contact between the men is marked

by his helplessness and subordinate position with respect to Constantino.

Their daily exercise in a *sala de armas* draws attention to José María's self-professed physical inferiority to Constantino. His ambivalent feelings towards Constantino are apparent in this passage:

[Para Constantino] ... era necesidad orgánica poner en variadas flexiones y contracciones los poderosos músculos [...] Se subía por una cuerda, se colgaba de una barra, andaba largo rato en cuclillas. Contemplábale yo con la admiración que inspira todo bruto incansable. Quizás mi odio me hacía tenerle por más bruto de lo que era en realidad. (291)

Juxtaposed in this passage are feelings of admiration and hate. His admiration over Constantino's physical prowess leads to several instances in which he pits himself physically against Constantino in bouts of physical exertion.

José María continually calls attention to the fact that he is weaker, although he does not conceal his desire to thrash Constantino: "Le tenía ganas; habría gozado mucho dándole un buen porrazo, ya que el matarle no estaba en mis sentimientos [...]" (291). Constantino's physical games include wrestling-type matches, in which José María is always at a disadvantage. His intensity of feelings towards Constantino are so powerful that he tries to choke him during one of their wrestling games, where the two end up embraced on the floor: "De improviso, viéndome sobado y golpeado estúpidamente, nació en mí un ardiente apetito de brutalidad; cegué, perdí el tino, no supe lo que me pasaba y, echándole ambas manos a su pescuezo robusto, caímos, rodamos" (292). "Brutalidad" here is applied to himself, instead of Constantino, as has been the case up until now. In this encounter, José María ends up pinned under Constantino instead:

El manchego se repuso, y, desasiéndose, ganó pronto ventaja. No tardé en estar debajo. Cogióme las manos, sujetándome los brazos con el peso de su cuerpo; dejóme sin movimiento ni respiración, hecho un lío, una momia. ¡Cómo ostentaba su poder ante mi debilidad! Así me tuvo un rato, dueño de mí, mirándome y escarneciéndome como si yo fuera un muñeco con apariencias de hombre. (292)

Homoeroticism is encoded in these scenes of violence between Constantino and José María. The terms in which he describes his powerlessness against Constantino's strength denote a rape: a subordinated and dominated position which is repeated in the following episode when he tries to drown Constantino and ends up almost drowning instead: "Creí que no me seguiría; pero, impávido, me siguió [...] Y me acometió, saltóme a los hombros, y sus poderosas manos me hundieron a su vez [...] Por suerte, ambos volvimos pronto a la superficie [...]" (293-94). These scenes of explosive violence also demonstrate the play between what is known and what is unknown. While José María tries to get Camila to have an affair with him, he encourages a bond with Constantino in order to throw him off. Thus, he enters into these situations with ambivalent feelings for Constantino: his concealed hatred and disdain conflict with his declared admiration of Constantino's physical strength, and he finally realizes that his bond with Constantino is, indeed, more than just a rivalry over Camila.

The weakness described in these incidents of physical aggression echo the weak and dependent position in which José María finds himself at the end of the novel when a debilitating stroke leaves him paralyzed on his left side and unable to walk (456-57). He cannot eat or talk for a time after his stroke, and when he does it is with difficulty: “después de lo que hablé atropellada y dificultosamente, la lengua me hacía cosquillas y se declaraba en huelga completa, negándome hasta los monosílabos” (475). It becomes clear at this point that José María not only desires Camila, but also Constantino. Earlier in the chapter he states: “Desde que me entraron las chocheces, les quería a los dos, a Camila, como siempre, con exaltado amor, a Constantino, con no sé qué singular cariño entre amistoso y fraternal. Los dos me interesaban ...” (449). The scene on the stairs, right before the fall that causes his stroke, is where hidden desire is finally spoken. José María, in his desperation and anxiety at being shut out of the couple’s life, cries out to the couple that he wants both of them to love him: “Queredme o me mato; queredme los dos...” (455). A traditional reading of the novel would simply read this as his desperation when he realizes that the couple will not accept him as their friend any longer. However, in the context of these textual clues of desire—largely articulated as hostility in the text—José María’s anguished cry “queredme los dos” can be read as expressing this repudiated desire. “Lo prohibido,” then, would seem to signify not only the prohibited sexual possession of a married woman, but a forbidden and foreclosed homoerotic desire as well.

It is here that the text removes all possibility of further male homosocial bonds. José María is rendered helpless and immobile from a stroke. He is unable to talk, and is only able to make horrible sounds (457). Put another way, for José María it is no longer possible to participate in a situation which would necessitate a strong bond with another male. It is this foreclosure of a possible situation which can be termed “homosexual panic.” Sedgwick argues that male entitlement, especially in the nineteenth century, necessitated intense male bonds, so that “male friendship, mentorship, admiring identification, bureaucratic subordination, and heterosexual rivalry all involve forms of investment that force men into the arbitrarily mapped, self-contradictory, and anathema-riddled quicksands of the middle distance of male homosocial desire [...]” (*Epistemology* 186). In other words, a society which depends on male bonds, such as those present in *Lo prohibido* between José María and other men, causes a situation in which those men can only enter into those bonds by acknowledging that space as potential homoerotic space, and having that “threat” hanging over them always (186). Homosexual panic is a “coercive double bind” which is almost always invisible, and acts, as Sedgwick suggests, as a form of social blackmail over men, making them conform to a socially-sanctioned (i.e. heterosexual) mode of sexuality (*Between Men* 89). José María’s cry “queredme los dos” is a textual inscription of that potential desire. Because José María dies at the end, the narrative enacts the mechanism of homosexual panic; closure happens just at the moment when it becomes possible to acknowledge the possibility of a homoerotic desire on the part of José María.

Lo prohibido engages with the meaning of certain binary concepts (known/unknown, public/private, and secrecy/disclosure), suggesting that these binaries are not distinct in the

text and instead are fluid and mobile. The problematic binaries most evident in the text are indicative, as Sedgwick suggests, of the moment when same-sex desire was becoming a distinct ontological category. The fact that *Lo prohibido* incorporates and plays with these binaries suggests that the prohibition against same-sex sexuality is in fact an important part of the text. José María's death at the end of the novel can thus be read as a textual homophobic reaction to that potentially disclosed homoerotic desire which marks the last of his relationships with men.

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NOTES

¹ See also Terry and Jo Labanyi 126-38.

² See Tsuchiya, Charnon-Deutsch, Willem, and Terry.

³ Eve Sedgwick defines homosociality to mean very specifically "bonds between men" and to describe a continuum of these relationships, from homosocial to homosexual (*Between Men* 1-5).

⁴ The theoretical underpinnings of this essay are based on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's ideas on the importance of the homosocial/ homosexual dialectic in western culture, grounded in her analyses of English and American literature. I acknowledge that importing cultural theories from one context to another has its perils; however, because much work has been done by cultural critics on nineteenth-century England and America on this topic, and since Sedgwick's work has been seminal in describing the homo/hetero definitional crisis during this period, it is useful to start there in order to elaborate a more culturally-specific reading of this novel.

⁵ Hence the use of 'homoerotic' rather than 'homosexual.' The use of the term 'homosexual' is very specifically tied to a particular historical moment (the present); the use of this term, as critics, including Jagose and Halperin, point out, would incorrectly assume an unproblematic continuity between historical and present-day same-sex acts, instead of foregrounding differences and similarities in sexual practices between different historical periods. Halperin 17-19, Sedgwick 45-48, and Jagose 18-19.

⁶ Sedgwick calls male homosexual panic the "normal condition of male heterosexual entitlement" because it is the way in which heterosexual men, vulnerable to "homophobic blackmail" due to social pressure, are made to conform to a socially-sanctioned (i.e. heterosexual) mode of sexuality (*Epistemology* 20-21, 185).

⁷ Examples of scholarship on early modern Spain include the collection of essays in *Queer Iberia*. For an example of twentieth-century criticism see Smith. Historians have also followed this pattern. Two examples of historical studies are Alberto Mira Nusselles's *De Sodoma a Chueca* and Rafael Carrasco's *Inquisición y represión sexual en Valencia*. The first is a social history of homosexuality in twentieth-century Spain; the second concerns itself with early modern Spain.

⁸ In addition to the critics discussed, also see Romero Pérez and Barr.

⁹ See Aldaraca 214-18 and McGibonney 482.

¹⁰ Scanlon comments: "The relationship with Eloísa, initiated and sustained by a strong element of competition, is a perfect example of what René Girard describes as triangular desire, a desire which is not spontaneous but brought into existence by a mediator" (838).

¹¹ See Chapter One "'Triangular' Desire" in Girard.

¹² See Alda Blanco, and James Whiston, "Trabajo y dinero en *Lo prohibido*."

¹³ See *Epistemology* 73-74, and *The History of Sexuality* 43.

¹⁴ Linda Willem argues that the narrative premise of the novel (the fact that the novel is in memoir format) affects the novel in significant ways, not the least of which is that it puts into question the narrator's authorial autonomy.

¹⁵ Arthur Terry suggests the same thing regarding the novel. See also Barker-Benfield for a more in-depth discussion on how economic terminology is used in medical discourse in nineteenth-century America. Many of his insights resonate with what we see in Spanish cultural discourses about sexuality during the same period.

¹⁶ Aldaraca (chapter 3) and Jagoe (chapter 4) both point out that it is women who are seen to have a problem with overspending and thus "el lujo" in nineteenth-century Spain. Women's supposed susceptibility to "unproductive" spending is seen to be totally at odds with the "productive" use of the investment of capital.

¹⁷ As Whiston notes in his introduction to the novel, the narrative also makes an implicit contrast between the healthy Miquis marriage and the illnesses of others (27).

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