REVISTA ÚRSULA

Defending the Unfaithful Female Body in *Un crimen pasional* (1922) by Author and Attorney Alberto Valero Martín

Una defensa del cuerpo femenino infiel en *Un crimen pasional* (1922) por el autor y abogado Alberto Valero Martín

Leslie Maxwell Kaiura

(University of Alabama in Huntsville)

leslie.kaiura@uah.edu

RESUMEN: Este artículo examina el problema de los femicidios por honor y pasión en la Edad de Plata española y las respuestas críticas que provocó por parte de la feminista Carmen de Burgos y varios novelistas hombres. Entre ellos se encuentra el abogado y autor Alberto Valero Martín, quien siguió el ejemplo de Burgos al publicar cinco novelas cortas que defienden a mujeres infieles o caídas frente a los excesos del código del honor y a la desigualdad jurídica de la mujer. Su novela corta *Un crimen pasional* (1922) rechaza una concepción del carácter moral femenino basada exclusivamente en la pureza sexual y condena el trato indulgente hacia los crímenes de honor y pasión, los cuales, en realidad, constituyen manifestaciones de la creencia masculina en su derecho de propiedad y dominio sobre las mujeres y sus cuerpos.

ABSTRACT: This article examines the problem of honor and passion femicides in Silver Age Spain and the critical responses it provoked from feminist Carmen de Burgos and a number of male popular novelists. Among these is lawyer and author Alberto Valero Martín, who followed Burgos's example by publishing five novelettes that defend unfaithful or sexually fallen women from the excesses of honor ideology and gender inequality in the law. His 1922 novelette *Un crimen pasional* rejects a vision of women's moral character as exclusively based on their sexual purity and condemns the lenient treatment of crimes of honor and passion that are, in reality, manifestations of men's belief in their entitlement to and ownership over women and their bodies.

Recibido: 01/10/2025
Aceptado: 23/12/2025

ISSN 2659-9104

PALABRAS CLAVE: Femicidio, Infidelidad, la Edad de Plata, la literatura de quiosco, Alberto Valero Martín, Carmen de Burgos.

KEYWORDS: Femicide, Infidelity, Silver Age Spain, Kiosk Literature, Alberto Valero Martín, Carmen de Burgos.

Since it was introduced in 1976 by sociologist Diana Russell, the term "femicide" has been adapted into Spanish as *femicidio* or *feminicidio* and has been increasingly used to protest the killings of women and girls. As Russell emphasizes, femicide is not any killing of women; rather, it "specifically points to and politicizes the sexist, patriarchal, misogynistic killing of women and girls by men" (1). The "Ni una menos" campaign against femicide that began in Argentina in 2015 has transformed into a major movement in other countries such as Mexico, Chile, and Perú, an expansion that is not surprising considering that as of 2023, 14 of the 25 countries with the highest femicide rates were in Latin America or the Caribbean (Bacilio). This high incidence of femicide in Hispanic cultures can be traced back across the Atlantic, where despite legislative efforts to curb violence against women, Spain also ranks high among the femicide rates of European countries[1].

The problem of femicide can also be traced back in time. This article hearkens back to an anti-femicide campaign that predates "Ni una menos" by a century: critiques of honor and passion violence in Silver Age Spain, including calls to abolish Article 438 of the Penal Code of 1870, which provided only a token penalty for men who killed a wife and/or her lover when the adulterers were surprised *en flagrante delicto*. Men who wounded a wife or lover were exempt from punishment, while those who killed were only liable to *destierro,* that is, banishment from the region for a term of six months to six years[2]. However, when jury trials were established for criminal cases between 1889 and 1923, all-male juries frequently exonerated men who killed unfaithful wives or other women who did not conform to male desires. Using the exonerating circumstance of "fuerza irresistible" when Article 438's narrow *in flagrante* circumstance did not apply,

[1] In data compiled by the Mediterranean Institute for Investigative Reporting on intimate-partner femicides in 18 European countries between 2012 and 2022, Spain ranked fourth behind Germany, Italy, and France. Out of 12 countries in 2022, Spain led by far in the number of national support line calls from female victims of domestic violence (Louloudi et al.).

[2] Article 26 of the penal code lists sentences by severity, while Article 29 sets their duration, with six months being the longest duration for the sentence of *destierro*. According to Article 116, the region could have a radius as small as 25 kilometers or as large as 250 kilometers from a specified point (*Código penal reformado*).

juries absolved men of many crimes against women motivated by jealousy, offended honor, break-ups, and unrequited love[3]. Not coincidentally, the term *crimen pasional* first came into use in the press during these years as sensationalist crime reporting trends made their way to Spain (Laguna Platero and Martínez Gallego 53). Furthermore, the rise of the *crimen pasional* in the press coincided with a renewed focus on masculine honor and numerous references to Pedro Calderón de la Barca and his works. As the nation grappled with its decline after the Disaster of 1898 and faced the potential social upheaval of women's liberation, many writers sought to ground Spanish masculinity in the mythic Golden Age and *el honor calderoniano*, interpreted primarily from Calderón's wife-murder plays such as *El médico de su honra* (1637)[4]. On the flip side, of course, this centuries-old patriarchal discourse called for women to be chaste and obedient housewives under the threat of violence should they stray or even appear to do so. Thus, the concepts of honor killings and crimes of passion became intertwined with each other and with debates about gender roles and the fate of the nation, with women's lives caught in the middle.

This article will examine the problem of honor and passion femicides and some of the critical responses to it in Silver Age Spain before delving into the work of forgotten poet, novelist, and lawyer Alberto Valero Martín (1882–1941). The Silver Age, typically dated between 1898 and 1936, saw an explosion of literature, art, and mass culture that included a booming newspaper industry and numerous collections of what has come to be called kiosk literature. Cheap, mass produced novelettes in series like *El Cuento Semanal* (1907–1912) and *La Novela de Hoy* (1922–1932) fed the interest of the growing reading public. While many of these works have been dismissed due to their perceived lack of literary merit, they have been increasingly studied in recent decades due to their depictions of the social, scientific, political, and economic issues of their time[5]. Women's sexuality and honor / passion violence are two such topics that this article examines in

[3] Article 8 excuses from punishment "El que obra violentado por una fuerza irresistible" (*Código penal reformado*).

[4] For more on the relationship between gender, the discourse of Spanish nationhood post-1898, and the use of Golden Age mythos, see Roberta Johnson or Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vásquez García, among others.

[5] This mass-culture phenomenon has been called "the Other Silver Age". Among other scholarship on the phenomenon, kiosk literature collections have been catalogued in the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas' *Colección Literatura Breve*, and a number of studies have been produced by members of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid's research group "La Otra Edad de Plata", such as those in the bibliography edited by Ángela Ena Bordonada and Dolores Romero López.

Valero Martín's works, in particular the novelette *Un crimen pasional*, published in *La Novela de Hoy* in 1922[6]. This novelette is the first of five works published in that series in which Valero Martín features unfaithful or sexually fallen female protagonists and argues on their behalf from various angles, asserting that honor ideology's narrow focus on female sexuality is hypocritical and unjust; that the necessity of marriage and lack of divorce can trap women in untenable relationships; that there are understandable, and even legitimate, reasons why women turn to infidelity; and that forgiveness or reconciliation are better alternatives than social ostracization or honor killings. The other novelettes are *La venganza del muerto* (1924), *El marido de Mercedes* (1925), *La sangre del sacrificio* (1925) and *La buscadora de inquietudes* (1927). *La sangre del sacrificio* diverges somewhat from the others in that it tells the story of a 15-year-old girl who kills herself after being raped and deprived of her honor and hopes for a happy future. The others feature adult women in long-term relationships (all married except the seduced protagonist of *Un crimen pasional*) who take lovers to fulfill unmet emotional or sexual needs.

Three of these women are unjustly condemned, two to death and one to prison for killing her exploitative husband, while two earn redemption or reconciliation through repentance. All of them are defended by their lawyer-author, who sought to undermine honor ideology and the extreme bias against female adultery that led not only to femicides, but to public approval of such crimes and exonerations of the perpetrators. Having worked on at least two high profile cases of men who attacked or killed unfaithful wives and were later absolved, Valero Martín would have intimately understood the social and legal dynamics of the issue. He also likely gained insight and perspective through his friendship with early Spanish feminist Carmen de Burgos, whose influence is palpable in *Un crimen pasional* and *El marido de Mercedes*. With Burgos's well-studied feminist

[6] Valero Martín initiated his literary career with a collection of poetry in 1909 and continued publishing poems in the press throughout his life. He collaborated in a number of the kiosk collections, including *Los Contemporáneos, La Novela del Bosillo, El Libro Popular, La Novela Corta, El Cuento Galante*, *La Novela Semanal,* and *La Novela de Hoy*. The works featured in this study all appeared in *La Novela de Hoy* along with ten additional novelettes. His work had tendencies toward *castellanismo* and eroticism, with the latter becoming more predominant later in his career (Hernández Cano). He was also well known as a lawyer, participating in several high-profile cases including the defense of fellow popular authors Alfonso Vidal y Planas for murder in 1923, and Emilio Carrere for a public scandal charge in 1928. An intriguingly contradictory figure, Valero Martín espoused liberal values, and yet near the end of his life, he wrote sonnets dedicated to the likes of José Millán Astray and José Antonio Primo de Rivera. He spent the Civil War in Republican territory, but assiduously worked in the courts on behalf of imprisoned Nationalists (Hernández Cano).

novelette *El artículo 438* (1921) as a reference, this article will analyze *Un crimen pasional*, a work in which Valero Martín rejects a vision of women's moral character as exclusively based on their sexual purity and condemns the lenient treatment of crimes of honor and passion that are, in reality, manifestations of men's belief in their entitlement to and ownership over women and their bodies. Valero Martín depicts the vulnerability of women to sexual, psychological, physical, and judicial violence as he creates an earnest if imperfect defense of women whom his society scorned as immoral and unworthy.

Female Infidelity and Femicide in Silver Age Spain

One hundred years before "Ni una menos", Carmen de Burgos made this observation in a 1915 installment of her column "Femeninas": "Raro es el día que los cajistas no tengan que poner bajo el epígrafe 'El crimen de hoy' el subtítulo 'Otra mujer muerta'". She added, "No hay ningún país en que mueran mayor número de mujeres del furor de los hombres que en España", and went on to criticize the culture's often hypocritical gallantry and the general lack of respect for women that led to harassment, abuse, and murder (3)[7]. By this date, the prevalence of violence against women and the benevolent treatment of male aggressors by juries and the public had become notable in the press. In 1917, novelist and playwright Cristóbal de Castro wrote, "Cuando un hombre mata a una mujer y hay por medio la palabra amor, los españoles tienen siempre a mano disculpas. Tanto creció el rosal calderoniano que cubre el raciocinio y lo sofoca. Así, matar no es matar, sino 'curar'" (3). Indeed, as a lawyer, Valero Martín utilized Calderonian honor discourse at least once to defend a husband who attempted to murder his estranged wife as she and their daughter strolled down a Madrid Street with another man. Alberto Robles shot and then stabbed his wife but did not manage to kill her. At his trial, Valero Martín is reported as proclaiming this to the jury:

> Alberto Robles, nacido en el siglo XVI, hubiese sido con su tragedia el protagonista de una gran comedia de D. Pedro Calderón de la Barca. Condenar a Alberto Robles sería tanto como renegar de España, de la madre y de los hijos. Sólo nuestra arcaica ley penal puede acusar a Alberto Robles, ninguna persona justa y de corazón puede hacerlo (Ullrich 3).

[7] All the newspaper articles used in this study can be retrieved from the Hemeroteca Digital of the Biblioteca Nacional de España.

Robles was exonerated to public satisfaction, and Valero Martín was praised for his "brillante oración forense: elocuente y conciso, [que] ha logrado emocionar y convencer" (Ullrich 3). As this article will show, however, Valero Martín's private beliefs diverged from the rhetoric and prejudices he took advantage of to defend Robles, and in his fiction, he worked against the sexual double standard and Calderonian rhetoric that too often led to women's violent deaths.

Few voices spoke out against honor and passion femicides prior to the 1920s, but the ones who did often identified the dual problems of Calderonian honor rhetoric and judicial leniency. One anonymous writer from 1907 spread the blame among juries, lawyers, and the theater:

> La lenidad de jurados imbéciles, perturbados por abogados hábiles y no adiestrados por fiscales inteligentes, unida a la odiosa literatura teatral de héroe de navaja y drama pasional comprimido, son dos causas poderosas del incremento de este género de delitos, que constituyen para Madrid una gran vergüenza ("Carne de navaja" 1).

Popular novelist Pedro de Répide also published an article, "El honor y la navaja", in 1915, arguing against antiquated ideals and criticizing those who think that sexual misconduct is an excuse for taking a human life: "No hay derecho a matar a nadie", he writes, concluding, "No es lícito seguir sosteniendo el prejuicio calderoniano" (2).

Whether the violence was attributed to honor, passion, or both, murders of allegedly unfaithful women in Silver Age Spain clearly fit into Russell's conception of femicide: they are sexist, misogynist acts rooted in sexual double standards and in the legal and social subjection of women. Not only were married women relegated to a civil status similar to children and the mentally incompetent, but they were also liable for harsher punishment for infidelity, or *adulterio*, a crime only attributable to wives and their lovers, not to husbands[8]. Husbandly infidelity, or *amancebamiento*, carried a lighter sentence that was only applicable if the affair caused a public scandal or was carried on within the family home[9]. It was legally permissible and socially acceptable for men to have mistresses; in fact, according to legal expert Luis Jiménez de Asúa, writing in the

[8] See Cristina Enríquez de Salamanca for more on women under Spain's Penal Code of 1870, Civil Code of 1889, and 19th-century legal discourse in general.

[9] The penal code reads as follows: from Article 448, "El adulterio será castigado con la pena de prisión correccional en sus grados medio y máximo. Cometen adulterio la mujer casada que yace con varón que no sea su marido y el que yace con ella, sabiendo que es casada," and from Article 452, "El marido que tuviere manceba dentro de la casa conyugal o fuera de ella con escándalo, será castigado con la pena de prisión correccional en sus grados mínimo y medio" (*Código penal reformado*).

1920s, Spanish men practiced "mercenary polygamy" and monogamous households were rare (Zubiaurre 35). In contrast, wifely adultery had long been viewed as one of the worst offenses imaginable, with writers from the Golden Age through the late 19th century describing it as the perversion of all moral principles and the source of discord, murder, and even war (Abascal Monedero 57, 127, 164). One treatise writer from 1879 went so far as to claim that adultery was the worst of all crimes listed in the penal code (including theft, murder, and rape), because it irreparably destroyed the sanctity of the home and family (An Engineer[10] 16-17). Furthermore, under the influence of scientific theories about women's bodies, infidelity or purportedly excessive sexual desire in a woman was often seen as pathological and stemming from defects in a woman's brain or reproductive organs. The influence of these ideas can be seen even in writers who sought to defend women, as did novelist Antonio de Zozaya when he wrote about a murdered adulteress in 1918: "Ante el cadáver de la perjura se siente conmiseración y respeto. Fue débil; acaso su organismo era víctima de perturbaciones, sin las cuales hubiera sido esposa y madre ejemplar. Ninguna mujer es mala por gusto; todas tienen el instinto de la honestidad" (1). Theories of eugenics that circulated at the time may also have contributed to the idea that an adulterous woman should be punished by death, thereby preventing her defective anatomical traits from being passed on to the next generation[11].

Unfaithful husbands were only doing "what all men do", or, in the words of Burgos's villainous Alfredo, "Soy un buen marido que no hace ni más ni menos que lo que hacen los demás hombres en mi caso" (*El artículo* 8). Meanwhile, married women suspected of or caught in adultery, along with mistresses and girlfriends deemed insufficiently faithful, were often subjected to violence and death, and their murderers were largely condoned and at times even celebrated. Defense attorneys and their clients were congratulated upon winning absolutions[12], and crime reporters wrote stories that condemned the victims of gender violence and sided with the perpetrators whenever female infidelity was involved. For instance, in one article from 1908, the anonymous

[10] I have not been able to identify the writer behind this curious pseudonym.
[11] For more on eugenics and sexual hygiene, see Zubiaurre (32-41).
[12] This is reflected in fiction in the public's approval of Alfredo's exoneration in Burgos's novelette (*El artículo* 56) and in the press, in articles such as the one already cited by Ullrich. The article "Un drama conyugal" from a 1918 issue of *El Globo* is another example; in it, a crowd applauds admitted wife-murderer Pedro Velasco and threatens to lynch his dead wife's lover, who was also wounded in Velasco's attack (2).

reporter described how a suspicious husband searched for his wife to "castigarla como por su infidelidad merecía". When he found her, "El justamente indignado esposo clavó el cuchillo una, dos, tres, muchas veces en los amantes, hasta que fue desarmado" ("Novelas en acción" 1-2). The sympathetic writer then explained how a husband who killed in this scenario would only be sentenced to banishment under Article 438 (2). However, as reflected in the press and in fictions like Burgos's novelette, juries preferred to absolve murderous husbands, which turned Article 438 –widely expanded in its scope by the exonerating circumstance of "irresistible force"– into a de facto license to kill[13].

Carmen de Burgos initiated a petition for equal rights for women with elements that were likely inspired by the "crimen del paseo de Rosales", a notorious 1918 wife-murder case that ended with an absolution in April 1921.[14] The petition asked, among other things, for women to be allowed to serve on juries, for the abolition of Article 438, and for equal treatment under the penal code, which would have entailed changes to the biased adultery laws. Presented to congress on May 31, 1921 by the Cruzada de Mujeres Españolas, of which Burgos was president, the petition reportedly included "millares de firmas" and gained the support of various press outlets, but its demands went unanswered[15]. Consequently, Burgos turned to fiction to further expose the injustices of the law, and *El artículo 438* appeared on October 1, 1921 in *La Novela Semanal*. Publishing her feminist critiques through the kiosk collections was an effective way for Burgos to disseminate her ideas to a wide audience; the series were sold by subscription, which "ensured that she would reach readers who had had little if any contact with feminist issues, thus obliging readers of all kinds to confront such matters" (Louis, "Melodramatic" 97). Indeed, this tale of an abusive, debauched husband entrapping his

[13] See Kaiura, "Getting Away with Wife Murder."

[14] In one of the most highly publicized wife murders in the Silver Age, Pedro Velasco Moreno shot his wife, María de Lourdes Ortega Morejón y Bunje, to death and wounded her lover on June 18, 1918. Velasco had been out of the country administering his wife's properties when he was informed of the affair by letter, returned to Madrid incognito, and stalked the lovers for three weeks before finding an opportunity to attack them when they were together. The murder was sensational largely because it occurred within the upper class, and it was the subject of dozens of newspaper articles in Madrid between its occurrence and Velasco's final absolution in April of 1921. Though press and popular opinion leaned heavily in favor of the betrayed husband, the incident provoked various reactions. María de Lourdes was condemned for her adultery, but there was evidence of entrapment, and Velasco's actions were premeditated and possibly motivated by a desire to acquire his wife's substantial fortune. See "Un suceso ruidoso."

[15] See the articles "Las sufragistas" and "Votamos en pro." There would not be another significant campaign against Article 438 until just before the penal code's revision in 1928, when the law became gender neutral before being abolished under the Second Republic (and later reinstated under Franco).

wife into adultery and then killing her to inherit her fortune was designed to make readers uncomfortably aware of the legal and social injustices facing women. The storyline is quite melodramatic, but it undoubtedly would have registered as familiar to readers who had recently seen a similar case play out in the newspapers during the "crimen del paseo de Rosales" trial. As Anja Louis observes, Burgos's use of melodrama, with its "possibility of saying everything with almost overwhelming emotional expression", let her "explain law to readers in a factual way" and "gave her an opening for overt legal critique" (*Women* 158). In addition to her detailed interrogation of the laws governing married women's lives, Burgos attacked the moral hypocrisy of "la burguesía estúpida [que] está siempre de parte del hombre que mata," and especially of women who condemned the victim while taking pride in their own virtue –hypocrisies that excused murder while censuring a respectful and loving sexual relationship (*El artículo* 56-58). One of Valero Martín's prime targets in his fictional defenses of women is this same moral hypocrisy that condones male promiscuity while damning women for pursuing their own desires, or, even more unjustly, for falling victim to men's sexual exploitation or violence.

Although Burgos's efforts in 1921 did not provoke legislative changes, her influence is notable. With few exceptions, nearly all of the men who signed their names to press articles protesting honor and passion violence were popular novelists who published in the kiosk literature collections and who thus existed within Burgos's social and intellectual orbit. In addition to Cristóbal de Castro, Pedro de Répide, and Antonio Zozaya, all quoted above, these popular writers spoke out on the topic: José Betancort Cabrera (Ángel Guerra), Manuel Bueno, Emilio Carrere, Miguel Sawa, Francisco Fernández Villegas (Zeda), Alberto Insúa, and Felipe Sassone. Others like Rafael López de Haro, Andrés Guilmain, and Alberto Valero Martín used fiction to make their statements[16]. In some cases, we can only conjecture about the possible influence of Burgos on these writers, but in the case of Valero Martín, the connection is undoubtable. According to multiple references in Rafael Cansinos-Asséns' memoir *La novela de un literato*, Valero Martín could often be found at Burgos's tertulia. The lawyer-author would certainly have been aware of her campaign for equal rights and of *El artículo 438*, and he participated in the trial that resulted from the "crimen del paseo de Rosales" as a private

[16] I am currently working on a book manuscript in which this phenomenon is documented and explored. For more on Rafael López de Haro and Andrés Guilmain, see Kaiura, "Getting Away."

prosecutor. In that trial, he and the lead prosecutor sought to disrupt the Calderonian honor narrative surrounding the case and prove that Pedro Velasco entrapped, stalked, and killed his wife for her money. Despite confessed premeditation, Velasco was absolved. Valero Martín is reported to have denounced Article 438 as "una vergüenza y un oprobio" before the court, but he did not comment on it further in the press ("Un proceso" 4).

As a lawyer who used any potential advantage to defend his clients, including leveraging honor discourse, Valero Martín may not have wanted to criticize Article 438 and other legal biases too openly, and so like Burgos, he turned to fiction[17]. In 1928, when he finally addressed the topic of honor and passion violence directly in an opinion column, readers had to cut through the heavy use of irony to find Valero Martín's true perspective underneath. In the article, titled "¿Qué haría usted si le engañara su mujer?" and written in response to one of the same name by his friend Emilio Carrere, Valero Martín states repeatedly that for Spanish men, there is only one answer to infidelity or unrequited love: to kill. He writes that the paradoxical statement, "¡La maté [. . .] porque no podía vivir sin ella!" had won more not-guilty verdicts than any speech lawyers could give (16). Only after a lengthy column establishing Spanish men's propensity toward violence does he add, "¿Qué todo esto es idiota, injusto, y repugnante? Puede que tengas razón, querido Emilio. Pero es preciso, para pensar de otro modo, ser tan grande y verdadero poeta como tú" (16). Evidently, Valero Martín felt that he could express his critiques of male entitlement and violence more forcefully through fiction than through other means, because in the novelettes featured in this study, he makes his opinions quite plain through narratorial commentary or through a character who becomes his mouthpiece to denounce violence or the legal subjection of women.

The lawyer found an excellent venue to publish his defenses of women, along with other, more salacious tales, in the erotic collection *La Novela de Hoy*, founded by writer and publisher Artemio Precioso. In a large market where erotic literature was proliferating, Precioso knew that titillating stories were a "commodity for which there was high demand across the whole social spectrum and across genders," and his

[17] In another instance, when he defended Alfonso Vidal y Planas in 1924, Valero Martín organized a jail-house wedding for his client and a woman who was part of the conflict between Vidal y Planas and his victim, Luis Antón de Olmet. According Cansinos-Asséns, Valero Martín thought that legitimizing the couple's relationship would grant Vidal y Planas "una fachada más honorable ante el Jurado", and give the murder "un aire retrospectivo de venganza calderoniana de un marido ultrajado" (73).

successful collections *La Novela de Hoy* and *La Novela de la Noche* (1924–1926) published nearly 600 novelettes (Zubiaurre 290–291). According to Maite Zubiaurre, these publications, along with other erotica, were "one of the few cultural areas in which Spain openly embrace[d] modernity" (296). They extol, to varying degrees, social and sexual liberation, including the recognition and description of female sex drive and sexual pleasure, although as Lily Litvak points out, most of them "sólo hacen una reducción pornográfica de la mujer" (72). However, some writers did use erotic fiction as a critical tool, including one of the originators of the erotic novel, Felipe Trigo, who "considered the sexual question inextricably tied to the social question, particularly to the role played by women in a rapidly changing society" and sought to "liberate women as sexual and social beings" (Zubiaurre 297). Trigo imagined a future in which women would work, live independently, and share "Una vida de dignidad y deberes y derechos absolutamente iguales a los del hombre" in his 1907 theoretical work *El amor en la vida y en los libros: Mi ética y mi estética* (177). However, as critics like Wadda Ríos-Font have noted, his fictions fall far short of feminist ideals and ultimately exploit "traditional images like the virgin / whore, the woman-monster, and the woman-corpse to reinforce existing patriarchal social and literary structures" (231).

Valero Martín follows in Trigo's footsteps both in his advocacy for women and its failings; though he does not fall into all of the strange gender contradictions of Trigo's socialist utopia, his novelettes also harbor various inconsistencies and compromises regarding women's traditional roles and more progressive views of gender. These ideological conflicts reflect the continuing influence of feminine models such as the *ángel del hogar* and a reluctance even on the part of more liberal male thinkers to give up the benefits of selfless care, love, and sacrifice that this model provides for men, children, and society. Expecting these virtues from women was problematic in part because little was guaranteed in return; men could easily escape their responsibilities to be faithful husbands or to provide for wives and children without damaging their reputation or facing legal consequences (Aresti 115). Moreover, in the 1920s, while many erotic novelettes and magazines featured sexually liberated flappers and working women, Nerea Aresti reminds us of "la pervivencia del mayor peso sociológico de la mujer tradicional". Regardless of the symbolic and political importance of modern female images, the flapper model "no se adaptaba a la mayoría de las mujeres españolas, tal vez ni siquiera a una

minoría significativa" (130). Many Spanish women's lives were still governed by a femininity largely drawn from the 19th century or were caught between conflicting models and demands.

Valero Martín's five critical novelettes reflect this conflict between tradition and progress in various ways. On one hand, they lean toward progress for women by recognizing the reality of women's desire and sexual needs and by pushing back against the limitations placed on women's lives by poor education, social strictures, and sexual double standards. In at least two cases, they call unjust laws or legal practices into question, including the impossibility of divorce, women's lack of parental rights, and courts that treat male violence leniently while punishing women mercilessly[18]. On the other hand, the eroticism is toned down in these novelettes because Valero Martín seems hesitant to create and defend a truly sexually liberated and independent woman. Thus, his defense of women is also rooted in maintaining aspects of a 19th-century version femininity that features a dedication to self-sacrificial love, motherhood, and sexual activity limited to loving, faithful relationships. The latter may include a woman abandoning an abusive or unfulfilling relationship for a better man who is then the object of her fidelity. In turn, these better men, present in *Un crimen pasional* and *La buscadora de inquietudes*, provide positive models for masculine responsibility that benefit women. In Valero Martín's fictions, a good woman deserves a good man who will meet her economic, emotional, and sexual needs, and yet, not all women are good. Some are downright dangerous despite their lack of actual status and power in society. As is manifested in other erotic novelettes from the kiosk collections, unbridled and excessive feminine freedom and desire are forces to be feared. The clichéd femme fatale "seeks the destruction of the male" (Zubiaurre 304)[19], as in Valero Martín's *Escapada del infierno* (1927), in which the titular escapee, Rosario, seduces her own father and later tries to kill her infirm husband by having sex with him until he is too weak to live. Such tales may have been written purely to titillate with their taboo topics, but regardless, Rosario is not

[18] In *El marido de Mercedes*, the novelette with the most legal content of the five, the titular character is trapped in a marriage to an unfaithful, exploitative, and abusive man, with no possibility of divorce and no parental rights over the son she has had with her lover (in an affair encouraged by her mercenary husband). When she eventually kills her husband while defending herself and her child, she is convicted and imprisoned; her infidelity is used in court to blacken her moral character, while her husband's history of debauchery and abuse is dismissed as untrue or irrelevant.

[19] See also Kaiura, "Del ángel del hogar al monstruo de la lujuria".

among the women that Valero Martín admires and defends. As he said in his own words in the prologue to *Un crimen pasional*, he liked women "buenas y dulces," and endowed with "la ternura, la sensibilidad, la piedad honda y conmovida" (7-8).

Male Entitlement and the Crucified Female Body in *Un crimen pasional*

Un crimen pasional features such a woman worthy of defending. The story is reminiscent of what Burgos's *El artículo 438* might have been if it were set among Madrid's urban working class rather than Granada's upper crust, and like that novelette, it also responds directly to the problem of men getting away with exploitation and femicide. Valero Martín uses similar melodramatic techniques to present the fallen female protagonist as a sympathetic victim, and to juxtapose the two men in her life in a stark opposition of good and evil that forces the reader to choose a side and to acknowledge the injustice of the story's ending[20]. *Un crimen pasional* recounts the life of Encarna, a poor and virtuous girl who, like her rich counterpart María de las Angustias in Burgos's novelette, has only romantic fantasies to guide her choice of a man rather than education or experience. Like Angustias, she falls for the most dashing fellow around, but Amalio is a petty criminal who intends to live off of Encarna's labor just as Alfredo finances his dissolute lifestyle with Angustias's fortune. Alfredo makes threats of violence, rape, and separation from their only daughter to force Angustias to sign over her wealth, while Amalio manipulates Encarna's love and hopes for marriage first to seduce her, then to control her in a husband-like manner, and finally, to coerce her into prostitution. Her love and her body are her only resources, and Amalio exploits them both because he feels entitled to female affection and service.

Four years later, Encarna meets and falls for Rafael, who, much like Angustias's lover Jaime, appears too good to be true against the backdrop of patriarchal culture. Rafael is a kind and hard-working widower, and Encarna abandons Amalio and her life of

[20] *El marido de Mercedes* which features a wife who kills her exploitative husband with her sewing scissors, also bears the clear influence of Burgos's novel *La malcasada,* in which the abusive husband meets the same ending (1923). *El marido…* also alludes to the connecting thread of historical murders by name-dropping the famous crime scene "el paseo de Rosales" (39).

prostitution to be with him and mother his young children. All too soon, however, a vengeful Amalio finds her, kills her, and is absolved by a jury who determines that he acted under the irresistible force of betrayed love. The pimp is not even her husband, and yet he is granted the same right of male ownership that allows him to kill her without repercussions, much like Alfredo, who uses Angustias's infidelity as an excuse to murder her and then rejoins society as a respectable, and richer, man after he is acquitted under Article 438. In sum, Burgos's novelette details the claustrophobic social and legal limitations placed upon a provincial upper-class woman, Valero Martín shifts the focus to the bodily vulnerability and abuse of lower-class women, and both expose the potentially fatal consequences of gender disparities.

In the same way that *Un crimen pasional* ends with Encarna's sacrifice on the altar of patriarchy, it begins with a portrait of the subjection and sacrifice of a lower-class Spanish woman. Encarna's mother, without "otras posibilidades económicas" than a miserable job as a laundress (9), works tirelessly to support her children only to have her money spent by an abusive, layabout lover. Besides sacrificing her body to endless toil, she subjects herself to violence for her children's sake. First, she bears her lover's blows silently, and then, when the children awaken and are threatened, she attacks him and is stabbed, shedding her blood on their behalf and foreshadowing Encarna's crucifixion-like death. The mother's body is not her own; it is devoted to her children and suffers the whims of her lover without any recompense of support or protection. As a wife, she would have had almost no leverage to force her husband to support the family, but as a poor, single woman, she has none at all over her lover or the absent father of her children[21]. After the stabbing, she is forced back to her life of heavy labor before she has fully recovered –a sign of her economic desperation. The unhappy mother has better hopes for her daughter, however; she finds Encarna a job ironing and tries to keep her away from the neighborhood *chulos*, but in the end, her daughter is doomed to repeat a variation of the same story of exploitation and abuse that begins with the conquest of the female body.

Furthermore, Encarna is not just any "body"; in her name and physical description, Valero Martín positions her as an incarnation of the industrious and virtuous Spanish woman. He describes her as "recogida", "laboriosa", and "modosa", and points

[21] See Aresti regarding the problems of a declining marriage rate among the working classes and paternal neglect of wives and children at this time (110-12).

out her Spanish bearing and clothing: "aquel ritmo castizo de sus andares, lleno de gracia y de brevedad, que hacía columpiarse en sus caderas el fleco elegantísimo de su mantón" (19-20)[22]. Izquierdo Durán's first illustrations of Encarna in the text further emphasize this identity, depicting her wrapped in a Manila shawl, carrying a fan, and blushing modestly over the catcalls of neighborhood men (Cover, 19). Encarna dreams of love, marriage, and motherhood, and she guards her honor, resisting Amalio's advances for two years even though she is infatuated with him and left alone and desolate by her mother's death. Nevertheless, all that it takes to destroy her idealized feminine identity is one night when "Encarna se encendió en amor y en deseos [. . .] y ocurrió cuanto tenía que ocurrir" (28). The narrative of her sexual fall seemingly explains how, between chapters one and two, Encarna has transformed from a modest, hard-working girl into a brash and shameless prostitute. She appears to illustrate the virgin / whore dichotomy forced upon women by honor ideology: "dijérase que eran dos Encarnas" (26) –two women who have nothing in common and yet are separated only by a loss of virginity outside of marriage.

However, Encarna's first fall is presented both as a deceptive seduction on Amalio's part (he has her "medio engañada") and as a natural flowering of her sexual desire that happens one "domingo primaveral" (28). This use of the spring season, which also appears in *El marido de Mercedes* as a marker of natural passions, is comparable to the way that Burgos uses the bounty of spring and botanical reproduction to symbolize the good and natural desire between María de las Angustias and her lover (Doyle 159-60). The desire itself is not wrong, but the social conventions governing women's bodies make it forbidden and will punish all three protagonists harshly despite both the existence of new models of female sexual liberation and the role dishonest men have had in creating their situations. Similarly, Encarna's second fall into prostitution is not what Valero Martín seems to suggest when he introduces the transformed Encarna as "impúdica y desvergonzada [. . .] como una libertina [que] miraba insinuante y lasciva a los hombres" (26). This description makes it sound as though Encarna's loss of virginity has propelled her directly into wantonness and depravity with no intervening steps, reflecting a line of 19th-century thought that considered chastity as the primary marker of a woman's entire

[22] In the following analysis, all quotations are from Valero Martín's *Un crimen pasional* unless otherwise indicated.

moral character, but yet of little importance to a man's. For instance, as jurist Joaquín Escriche wrote around mid-century,

> el pudor y la castidad son las primeras virtudes de las mujeres, y no se consideran sino como secundarias de los hombres, el hombre puede despojarse de ellas sin grave trascendencia, pero la mujer que las abjura, lleva la depravación a un punto más alto, la violación del pudor [. . .] supone en las mujeres la renuncia de todas las virtudes (qtd. in Abascal Monedero 164)[23].

As the raped protagonist of Valero Martín's *La sangre del sacrificio* laments, "[¡]las mujeres tenían la honra nada más que en la entrepierna!" (48). However, just as the lawyer condemns the antiquated view of honor in that novelette, in *Un crimen pasional* he backtracks in order to challenge this simplistic view of Encarna's sexuality and identity. Losing her virginity does not change her in any essential way; she still insists on her "honradez" (30) and though Amalio will not marry her, she fulfills the role of loving, submissive wife, even quitting her job at his insistence. Amalio causes their poverty, then uses it and Encarna's traditional, positive feminine qualities to manipulate her. When she insists on her honor, he accuses her of lacking the virtues that she clearly displays: "Lo que tú no tiés (*sic*) es lacha, ni delicadeza, ni corazón" (30). He pretends that he will be sent to debtor's prison and asks her to sacrifice her body for him, knowing exactly how to play on her desire to care "infinitamente por un hombre" (41) and begging her at the critical moment, "¿Pero vas a salvarme, Encarna de mi vida?" (34). Like her mother, Encarna then throws her body between her loved one and what (purportedly) threatens him. Mirroring the image of her mother warding off blows with crossed arms, Encarna protects her tear-stained face with "la cruz fresca y rosada de sus brazos" as she allows a neighborhood man to have sex with her for money (38). Thus, her supposed fall is far from an act of lust; rather, it is an act of sacrificial love that she tries to depersonalize as much as possible to remain faithful to her man, and that she mourns both during and after the act.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the text is its astute depiction of the psychological trauma Encarna suffers from being sexually exploited, a portrayal which serves to help redeem her but has negative implications for other women in similar situations. The narrator observes, "Nunca, sin embargo, llegó [Encarna] a adquirir del todo la psicología llena de bestialidad y de abominación de las prostitutas irremediables.

[23] The original source of this quotation is Escriche's *Diccionario razonado de legislación y jurisprudencia*. Abascal Monedero cites the 1851 edition, printed by the Librería de Rosa Bouret, p. 100.

En los fondos más íntimos de su alma, sentía una repugnancia invencible por aquella vida" (40). This clashes with the initial description of Encarna's provocative behavior as a prostitute, which could have been more clearly rendered as an act put on to survive life with a potentially violent pimp (though Amalio is not depicted as physically abusive early on, he shows his capacity for violence at the story's end). Moreover, Valero Martín's description of Encarna's experience rings true given what we know about sexual abuse survivors today. She experiences her first tricks as "un verdadero martirio," and as violations that feel like she is losing her virginity over and over again because these sex acts are coerced, not truly consensual (40). She begins to show the signs of a person caught in a degrading and traumatizing situation, experiencing an intense disgust with herself ("Despreciábase rabiosamente a sí misma" 40) and later disassociating from sexual encounters with her johns, "amparada en una especie de misteriosa subconsciencia que la permitía, sin reparar apenas en ellos y absolutamente ausente del placer y de la voluptuosidad, entregarse a los hombres" (41). This description helps Valero Martín separate Encarna and her inner self from the prostitution that she is forced to take part in; her mind and soul do not participate in or enjoy this sex with men she does not love, thus reserving a part of herself that is pure and good. In this way, Valero Martín suggests that the act of sex outside of marriage, whether prompted by love and desire, or by coercion or economic necessity, is not a total abdication of moral character for a woman. However, his language regarding "las prostitutas irremediables" fails to recognize how many other prostitutes are victims of necessity and exploitation, and it condemns women who may internally succumb to act of prostitution and perhaps enjoy their sexual encounters. Sexual desire and pleasure outside of marriage are not forbidden to women in Valero Martín's scheme, but they still should be accompanied by feminine virtues of love and emotional fidelity to be acceptable and defensible[24].

This reasoning is also reflected in Encarna's relationship with the new man who enters her life. Rafael is open, honest, and respectful, an attentive father to two young

[24] Similarly, in the case of Leonor, the adulterous protagonist of *La venganza del muerto*, her greatest flaw seems to be the purely sexual nature of her affair with a man who has no redeeming quality except his attractive physique. Her sexual needs are not condemned, but her choice of a loveless rendezvous with a shallow man is rejected and has fatal consequences. The lover is killed by the vengeful husband's ghost, but Leonor is spared so that she can "go and sin no more" like Jesus tells the adulteress in the gospels, a story that Valero Martín uses in the novelette to model repentance and forgiveness rather than honor vengeance.

children, and he married his late wife not because he loved her, but because he would not leave her dishonored –a direct inversion of Amalio's exploitative behavior. Rafael is a man Encarna can truly love, and as such, he awakens her passion as well. In a culture that still often viewed women as more concerned with emotional and maternal love rather than with bodily, sexual yearnings, Valero Martín recognizes Encarna's desire, which was repressed when she was prostituted but comes bursting to the fore when she has a loving partner. She kisses Rafael "apasionadamente" and is filled with "ternura amorosa", "también de pasión, de exaltación y de lujuria" (48). Despite the positive portrayal of their sexual encounter, this overt lust, a feeling anathema to traditional notions of proper Spanish femininity, is counteracted by being juxtaposed immediately with the image of Encarna as a "madrecita" to Rafael's two young children (49). Encarna naturally steps into the role of loving mother; her innocent young charges see the goodness that society would deny her based on her sexual history and reject their other caregivers in her favor. Encarna's true character –industrious, faithful, sacrificial, eager to love and care– is restored. Her past may not define her, but she has still been returned to the 19th-century status of the *ángel del hogar* rather than being granted some other alternative.

Nevertheless, Encarna is happy with Rafael, and yet even her bliss prefigures its tragic end. The narrator comments that Rafael's love "se le metió como un clavo en el corazón", an image that evokes both the ultimate sacrifice of crucifixion, and the suffering Virgin Mary, the supreme role model for Catholic women, with her pierced heart (49). Thus, Encarna's relationship with Rafael is marked early on with warning signs of bodily sacrifice and suffering. She is "destrozada de placer" and cannot kiss Rafael without closing her eyes "fatal y estremecidamente" (51). However, these ill omens are not connected to Rafael, but rather to the continuing threat of Amalio, as well as to the dangers inherent in Encarna's profound capacity for self-sacrificial love, ingrained in her by her understanding of femininity and her mother's example. While Valero Martín presents her renewed desire for sexual intimacy positively, as a natural response to the honest and caring reciprocity that she experiences with Rafael, her sexuality is still dangerous in social terms. Again, though "New Women" were emerging in the wake of World War I (Aresti 70-71) and sexually liberated flappers became an important symbol in the 1920s, press reports of femicides from early in the decade show the extent to which women and

their bodies were still at the mercy of male control and violence, with the 1921 absolution of Pedro Velasco in the Rosales femicide providing a prime (and not unique) example.

Although they are not married, Encarna's sexual relationship and cohabitation with Amalio give him a prior claim on her, both in his eyes and, ultimately, in the eyes of the jury that will decide his case. Planning to either regain control over her or take his vengeance, Amalio tracks her down when she is out for the evening with Rafael and other friends. He demands her love ("Y me quieres y me querrás" 59) and tries to force her to go with him. Despite his threats, Encarna refuses to call for help because she is afraid that Amalio will hurt Rafael and possibly because, as a fallen woman, she does not believe she merits the protection of a good man. Either way, her internalization of gender ideals contributes to her death. She faces her past sins alone, but Valero Martín does not condemn her as a sinner; quite the opposite. Amalio attempts to cut Encarna's face with a razor (a fashion among *chulos* at the time), but she struggles and he cuts her throat. She falls "de espaldas y con los brazos abiertos, como crucificada" (61), a position which signals her sacrifice on Rafael's behalf, but more importantly, her status as an innocent victim akin to the crucified Christ, despite her history of concubinage and prostitution. This ending creates an interesting contrast to the resolutions *La venganza del muerto* and *La buscadora de inquietudes*, where the married female protagonist chooses infidelity in an attempt to meet her emotional or sexual needs. While these protagonists still merit Valero Martín's sympathy, they are not innocent victims and must go through a process of repentance to be saved from vengeance and societal scorn. Encarna, on the other hand, is the incarnation of devoted Spanish femininity who has escaped victimization to regain her appropriate (if not yet formalized by marriage) place in society. Unlike the other women, she has nothing for which to repent because Amalio never deserved her fidelity, nor gained a legal right to it through marriage.

Un crimen pasional is arguably the most tragic and unjust of Valero Martín's four tales of female infidelity, rivaling the horribly undeserved and self-inflicted death of *La sangre del sacrificio*'s rape victim. In a sense, Encarna's death is also a suicide provoked by gender expectations, sexual double standards, and male entitlement over women's bodies and lives. The brief epilogue spells out the lawyer's critique of Amalio's trial and its result, which is the defendant's absolution in spite of his confession and his lack of marital rights over his victim. Valero Martín writes that Amalio whined ("gimoteó" 63)

front of the jury and that the defense presented him as a victim of Encarna's betrayal in order to win an acquittal, just like Alfredo is turned into the victim by society and the court in Burgos's novelette. Valero Martín's version ends with this:

> De nuevo, y en los labios de la defensa, sonaron los eternos tópicos calderonianos, el canto histriónico del honor y de la venganza.
>
> Amalio, en aquel discurso mediocre, era un pasional, un vehemente, un enamorado. La mujer a quien infinitamente amaba le hizo traición. Aquella ingratitud y aquella vergüenza le arrebataron el corazón y el sentido. Él la amaba honradamente, con una pasión que era casi divina en fuerza de ser humana, y al encontrarse aquella mujer allí, prostituyéndose en un merendero público, el desdichadísimo Amalio enloqueció de amor y de dolor…
>
> Los jueces populares asintieron unánimemente, y "Boca de hacha" [Amalio] fue absuelto con todos los pronunciamientos favorables… (63).

This discourse echoes biased and emotive language that can be found in historical press reports of femicides and trials in which reporters and attorneys attacked the victim's reputation and portrayed the aggressor as man who acted out of love for an unworthy woman who had provoked her own death. Besides condemning such rhetoric as histrionic and mediocre, Valero Martín highlights its hypocrisy by using the term "prostituyéndose" to describe Encarna's loving and reciprocal relationship with Rafael when the reader is well aware that it was Amalio who prostituted her against her will.

It is interesting that Valero Martín openly critiques in fiction an argument that he had used in court to procure the absolution of Alberto Robles (and would later attempt to use on behalf of Alfonso Vidal y Planas[25]), but is perhaps more intriguing that he chose an unmarried woman and her ex-lover as the victim and perpetrator in this story rather than focusing on another unfaithful wife, which would speak more directly to the trope of Calderonian honor vengeance that he explicitly criticizes in the epilogue. This choice does not allow him to speak directly to the injustice of Article 438 as Burgos did, but depending on how it is viewed, it either gives him additional force with which to critique gender disparities or allows him to skirt the issue of vengeance enacted by legitimate husbands (or, perhaps both at the same time). On one hand, choosing an unmarried female victim could be a deliberate way to expose the excesses of honor ideology, which had expanded the leniency granted to cuckolded husbands to make it apply to a broader spectrum of violence against women who failed to acquiesce to male desires[26]. He may

[25] See note 17.
[26] See Kaiura, "Getting Away" (302).

have chosen the poor and naïve Encarna, a victim of deception and exploitation, to make her more sympathetic because she has no vows to honor regarding Amalio and thus escapes the most damning charge leveled against her fictional predecessor in Burgos's *El artículo 438*. Following this interpretation, Amalio's behavior should be seen as even more egregious than Alfredo's; after all, he seduced and degraded a virtuous example of Spanish femininity, then killed her out of vengeance even though she had no formal obligations to him. However, this is where the societal bias against women who flouted male desire and / or pursued their own desire comes most strongly to the fore. Whether Encarna was married to Amalio or not, the fact that she let herself be seduced by him put her under his power. She is reduced to the status of an object that he can control, and his de facto rights over her are recognized by the jury, couched in a language of emotional duress and irresistible force that privileges the excesses of male passion while denying the emotional truths behind women's romantic and sexual choices.

On the other hand, using an unmarried woman as his protagonist may have been a way for Valero Martín to skirt an internalized bias in favor of wronged husbands who kill. In the other three infidelity novelettes, he avoids having the husband kill his unfaithful wife and thus does not need to end the narrative by putting the husband on trial and challenging his more legally and socially legitimate motive for murder. In short, Valero Martín may have fallen victim to the internalization of patriarchal biases just as some of his characters do. Not only does Encarna face Amalio alone to avoid ensnaring Rafael in the violent consequences of her sexual fall, but the protagonist of *La buscadora de inquietudes* also demonstrates how the bias in favor of vengeful men could be internalized by potential female victims. In that novelette, Celia returns to her husband convinced that her "infamia era tan grande que no merecía perdón" (50) and that he has a right to kill her for running off with a man who seemed to offer her the poetry and passion she desired. In part because she is afraid of shame and social ostracization, she begs her husband Juan, "¡Escúpeme! ¡Mátame! ¡Clávame un cuchillo en el corazón!" (53). However, contrary to her expectations, Juan exclaims, "¡Yo soy más hombre que esos que matan a las mujeres! ¡Te quiero a ti mucho más que a mis deseos de venganza!" (53). Although he is a boring and not very manly accountant, Juan, like Rafael, becomes a model for a better kind of masculinity: one that loves, supports, and sacrifices on behalf of women rather than only taking advantage of women's services and sacrifices.

Consequently, even if Valero Martín was hesitant to condemn the vengeance of a good husband toward an unfaithful wife, he still makes an argument on behalf of women by recognizing their needs and by providing models of responsible, respectful men who forgive or who know how to value women regardless of their sexual past.

Conclusion

In the end, Alberto Valero Martín's defense of women may be unsatisfactory for feminists in the 21st century and the age of protest movements like "Ni una menos." However, across the five novelettes mentioned in this study, he exposes a cross-section of Spanish society, revealing many challenges faced by women across the class spectrum: lack of education and experience, economic vulnerability and dependence, boredom and lack of fulfillment, sexual frustration and exploitation, and above all, the threat of violence if they failed to conform to feminine ideals and masculine desires. Valero Martín may have still had a preference for women who displayed qualities of the 19th-century *ángel del hogar*, but he refused to clip their wings if they rejected abnegation or exploitation and sought to meet their own emotional and sexual needs. The lawyer presented a case against the unjust fates of his dead or imprisoned protagonists and the men who victimized them, as well as the society that tolerated such injustice, and he advocated for forgiveness and reconciliation over condemnation and vengeance. If he failed to allow women a broad range of possibilities, he did at least argue for improving their agency, dignity, and bodily safety and autonomy, and these intermediate steps toward equality and justice are significant and worthy of being noted. Valero Martín largely worked within the patriarchal gender paradigm that was still in place for most Spanish women in his day, but in his own way, he upended it by arguing against male entitlement over women and their bodies and for the things that women deserved –love, passion, fulfillment, economic support, and safety from violence– in exchange for the benefits that they rendered to men, children, and society.

References

ABASCAL MONEDERO, Pablo José. *La infidelidad y el adulterio en España: Estudio histórico legal*. Universidad de Córdoba, 2009.

ARESTI, Nerea. *Médicos, donjuanes y mujeres modernas: Los ideales de feminidad y masculinidad en el primer tercio del siglo XX*. Bilbao, Universidad del País Vasco, 2001.

BACILIO, Cristell. "The Continuing Fight Against Femicide in Latin America". *International Relations Review*, 25 May 2023, irreview.org/articles/the-continuing-fight-against-femicide-in-latin-america.

BURGOS, Carmen de. "*El artículo 438". La Novela Semanal,* vol. 1, no. 15, 1 Oct. 1921.

———. "Femeninas: Otra mujer muerta". *Heraldo de Madrid,* 28 July 1915, p. 3.

CANSINOS-ASSÉNS, Rafael. *La novela de un literato (Hombres–Ideas–Efemérides–Anéctodas…), vol 3. 1923-1936.* Alianza Editorial, 1995.

"Carne de navaja: Los mártires del matrimonio". *El País* [Madrid], 6 July 1907, p. 1.

CASTRO, Cristóbal de. "La tiranía del chulo". *La Nación* [Madrid], 26 Sept. 1917, p. 3.

CLEMINSON, Richard, and Francisco VÁSQUEZ GARCÍA. *A History of Male Homosexuality in Spain, 1850–1940.* U of Wales P, 2007.

Código penal reformado, mandado publicar provisionalmente, en virtud de autorización concedida al Gobierno por la ley de 17 de junio de 1870. Madrid, Imprenta del Ministerio de Gracia y Justicia, 1870.

DOYLE, Kathleen. "Body of Evidence: The Legislation of Female Desire in 'El Artículo 438' by Carmen de Burgos". *Letras Femeninas*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2004, pp. 155-64.

"Un drama conyugal". *El Globo* [Madrid]. 20 June 1918, p. 2.

ENA BORDONADA, Ángela, editor. *La otra Edad de Plata: Temas, géneros y creadores (1898–1936).* Madrid, Editorial Complutense, 2013.

ENRÍQUEZ DE SALAMANCA, Cristina. "La mujer en el discurso legal del liberalismo español". *La mujer en los discursos de género. Textos y contextos en el siglo XIX*, edited by Catherine Jagoe et al. Barcelona, Icaria, 1998, pp. 219-252.

AN ENGINEER. *¡Guerra al adulterio! Estudio de ciencia social.* Madrid: Imprenta y Litografía de la Guirnalda, 1879. *Biblioteca Digital Hispánica de la Biblioteca Nacional de España,* bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000131675&page=1.

RÍOS-FONT, Wadda C. "'Horrenda Adoración': The 'Feminism' of Felipe Trigo." *Hispania*, vol. 76, no. 2, 1993, pp. 224-34. *JSTOR*, jstor.org/stable/344666.

HERNÁNDEZ CANO, Eduardo. "Alberto Valero Martín". *Real Academia de la Historia*, dbe.rah.es/biografias/57438/alberto-valero-martin. Accessed 20 Sept. 2025.

JOHNSON, Roberta. *Gender and Nation in the Spanish Modernist Novel*. Vanderbilt UP, 2003.

KAIURA, Leslie M. "Del ángel del hogar al monstruo de la lujuria: Género y ciencia en dos novelas populares". *Del salvaje siglo XIX al inestable siglo XX en las letras peninsulares: una mirada retrospectiva a través de hispanistas*, edited by Ana Isabel Simón Alegre. Vernon Press, 2022, pp. 143-58.

———. "Getting Away with Wife Murder: Article 438 in the Press and Popular Fiction". *Kiosk Literature in Silver Age Spain: Modernity and Mass Culture,* edited by Susan Larson and Jeffrey Zamostny, Intellect Press, 2017, pp. 287-309.

LAGUNA PLATERO, Antonio and Francesc-Andreu MARTÍNEZ GALLEGO. "Inventando el crimen pasional: del lenguaje de gacetilla a la prensa de sucesos (España, 1892-1920)". *Cercles. Revista d'Història Cultural*, vol. 24, 2021, pp. 47-78, doi.org/10.1344/cercles2021.24.1002.

LITVAK, Lily. *Antología de la novela corta erótica española de entreguerras, 1918–1936*. Madrid, Clásicos Taurus, 1993.

LOUIS, Anja. "Melodramatic Feminism: The Popular Fiction of Carmen de Burgos". *Constructing Identity in Contemporary Spain: Theoretical Debates and Cultural Practices,* edited by Jo Labanyi. Oxford UP, 2002, pp. 94-112.

———. *Women and the Law. Carmen de Burgos, an Early Feminist*. Tamesis, 2005.

LOULOUDI, Janine, Kostas ZAFEIROPOULOS, and Nikos MORFONIOS. "Trapped in Darkness: Women in Europe Remain Defenseless Against Gender-based Violence". Mediterranean Institute for Investigative Reporting, 3 Aug. 2024, miir.gr/en/femicides-violence-against-women-in-europe/.

"Novelas en acción: La esposa adúltera". *El Liberal* [Madrid], 9 July 1908, pp. 1-2.

"Un proceso ruidoso: El crimen del Paseo de Rosales". *La Acción* [Madrid], 1 Apr. 1921, p. 4.

RÉPIDE, Pedro de. "El honor y la navaja". *España* [Madrid]. 5 Aug. 1915, p. 2.

ROMERO LÓPEZ, Dolores, editor. *Los márgenes de la modernidad: Temas y creadores raros y olvidados en la Edad de Plata*. Punto Rojo Libros, 2014.

RUSSELL, Diana E. H. "My Years Campaigning for the Term 'Femicide'". *Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence*, vol. 6, no. 5, article 6, 2021, pp. 1-5. digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol6/iss5/6/.

"Las sufragistas españolas en el Congreso". *Heraldo de Madrid*, 31 May 1921, p. 2.

TRIGO, Felipe. *El amor en la vida y en los libros: Mi ética y mi estética,* 3rd ed. Madrid, Biblioteca Renacimiento, 1911. *HathiTrust*, catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001721233.

ULLRICH, A. "El día en los tribunales: Un drama conyugal: El final de la prueba". *Heraldo de Madrid*. 6 June 1919. p. 3.

VALERO MARTÍN, Alberto. *La buscadora de inquietudes. La Novela de Hoy*, vol. 6, no. 247, 4 Feb. 1927.

———. *Un crimen pasional*. *La Novela de Hoy*, vol. 1, no. 15, 22 Aug. 1922.

———. *Escapada del infierno*. *La Novela de Hoy*, vol. 6, no. 265, 10 June 1927.

———. *El marido de Mercedes*. *La Novela de Hoy*, vol. 4, no. 157, 15 May 1925.

———. *La sangre del sacrificio*. *La Novela de Hoy*, vol. 4, no. 167, 24 July 1925.

———. *La venganza del muerto*. *La Novela de Hoy*, vol. 3, no. 131, 14 Nov. 1924.

———. "¿Qué haría usted si le engañara su mujer?" *Heraldo de Madrid*, 17 May 1928, p. 16.

"Votamos en pro". *La Correspondencia Militar* [Madrid], 2 June 1921, p. 1.

ZOZAYA, Antonio. "El eterno drama." *El Liberal* [Madrid], 20 June 1918, p. 1.

ZUBIAURRE, Maite. *Cultures of the Erotic in Spain, 1898–1939*. Vanderbilt UP, 2012.