Women's Representations from Radical Naturalism to the New Woman Response

A Transatlantic Perspective of European, Latin American, and American Narratives

Dr José F. Rojas-Viana
Louisiana State University

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Introduction.
The Atlantic Basin and Views of Woman in the Nineteenth Century

The Atlantic Basin is a natural barrier that, once crossed by Europeans, facilitated a series of human contacts rich in transcendental transformations (Thornton 7). Pre- and post-Columbus voyages through the Atlantic were many in number and from different places. They produced continual clashes between world views that influenced and transformed cultures, politics, and history around the world (Thornton 7-8). Navigation through the Atlantic Basin can be marked as early as the thirteenth century, not only by Scandinavians but also by Caribbean inhabitants and later by the Portuguese in their travels to Africa (Thornton 8). From that point in time to the end of the nineteenth century, control of the Atlantic Basin marked the rise and fall of imperial and colonial rules, a significant element for European development. The forced immigration of Africans by Europeans is the darkest example in human history of the cruel colonial transatlantic power on the American continent. This inhuman and transformative practice lasted almost to the early twentieth century (Klein xv).

During the *fin de siècle,* the interest of European empires not only focused on economic growth but also promoted travelers, explorers, and writers in search of scientific, social, and geographical discoveries. These people were usually from England, the United States, or Spain. They crossed the Atlantic for various reasons (Guelke and Morint 306). Transatlantic travel in the nineteenth century was an explosive display of technical, scientific, social, racial, and political changes and perspectives. Literature and science marked many of these advances all over the world and formed a prevailing knowledge highlighting differences among human beings. Women were often the object of a negative differentiation echoed through many disciplines. European, North American and Latin American patriarchal literary works developed and depicted treacherous female characters, which early feminists responded to with creative strategies of opposition. The works analyzed in this book represent not only the reflection of the nineteenth-century view of women as biologically, psychologically, morally, hereditarily, and spiritually different from men but also the mechanisms of repression that helped to maintain these ideas as well as anti-establishment mechanisms that refuted them. By establishing a conversation among these works from different perspectives, this book reveals how deeply rooted the patriarchal intentions to control many aspects of

women were and how the New Woman writers reacted to it. These authors intentionally deconstructed the patriarchal model with strong arguments, debunking its substantive theories and positions from science to the political arena. These theoretical positions still resonate today and allow connections to contemporary literature.

This thesis, then, comparatively interprets representations of women within Radical Naturalism and New Woman perspectives from both sides of the Atlantic Basin. Hence, it argues metatheoretically that different constructions of female characters established a gendered dialogue through the themes of the *femme fatale,* alternative spaces, eugenics, and social Darwinism. Despite multiple locations, various languages, and different genders of authorship, the texts of both literary perspectives analyzed here converge in depicting women as submissive victims within patriarchal institutions such as the state, family, or society. However, whereas Radical Naturalism tends to create regressive characters that fall into marginal places, sickness, and death, the New Woman perspective tends to create progressive characters, allowing them to be successful and healthy with an alternative path. The novels that are selected to illustrate this thesis are as follows: *Santa* (1903), by Federico Gamboa from Mexico, *La hija del bandido o los subterráneos del nevado* (1887), by Refugio Barragán de Toscano from Mexico; *Tess of the D'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman* (1891), by Thomas Hardy from Great Britain; *Ideala* (1888), by Sarah Grand from Great Britain; *The Awakening* (1899), by Kate Chopin from the United States; and *La gota de sangre* (1911), *La piedra angular* (1891), and the short story "Tío Terrones" (1920), by Emilia Pardo Bazán from Spain.

Before moving to the analysis of these novels, it might be useful to explain and define some key terms deployed throughout this work. The term Naturalism was coined by Emile Zola, who suggested that writers need to express different perspectives on society as one would do in a scientific study. In their works, these writers generally focus on negative aspects of life and/or marginalities of all kinds to portray mostly female characters as marginal individuals (Ordiz 8). Radical Naturalism refers to an extreme version of naturalistic narrative, as Pura Fernández explains in her "Introducción" to *La prostituta (Novela medico-social)* (1884). The term was made by the Spanish writer Alejandro Sawa to describe a narrative that was also called the brothel novel, *barricada* [barricade], or *novela medico-social* [medico-social novel], as Fernández points out. This narrative usually has social, political, and medical perspectives and tends to bring all the events to the extreme, affecting the main character, often a woman. The New Woman was a literary and social trend in the 1890s (Rich 1). In her book *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism*, Ann Heilmann defines this concept as follows:

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