

Kisses in *La Regenta*: the Conflict of Spiritual and Physical Desire

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In the novel *La Regenta* (1884-1885), author Leopoldo Alas describes the fall of Ana Ozores, a fall resulting from both the spiritual and the social degeneration of the character. Her internal struggle depends on the conflict between her personal desire as a young woman for sexual love, and her social desire as a married Catholic for spiritual love. Throughout the novel, Alas uses the repeated action of a kiss, either desired or undesirable, both as a narrative technique to mark moments of Ana's decision to change, and as a trope to signal these alterations as treasons against her conscience. A series of five separate kisses manifests Ana's vacillation between maintaining her soul morally pure through religion and corrupting herself by giving in to her sexual desire. Through the kisses in the novel it is possible to see an echo of the symbolism used in both religious and sexual discourse representing either the treason of Judas against Jesus Christ, and consequently the betrayal of Ana in the novel, either by her own actions or by one of her male advisors; or as a synecdoche for sexual intercourse, and consequently the sexual temptation of Ana. Therefore, the kiss serves as a dual marker for religion and sex, emphasizing not only Ana's confusion between these two moral opposites, but also the mystic nature of her relationship with male characters representing these two poles of her conscience.

Although several literary critics have analyzed the importance of the last kiss in the novel, which occurs in the last scene, there has been relatively little or nothing written about the kisses as a structural technique and thematic leitmotif. In general, the criticism of *La Regenta* awards a thematic value to the last kiss, representative of the corruption of Ana, and the society of Vetusta, through the image of the toad. However, this argument is reductive, basing value of the image on the analysis of a single kiss. Investigated as a group, it can be seen that the kiss has a dual symbolic value, representing both desired and undesired sexual and spiritual contact. Additionally, their placement throughout the text demonstrates that Alas also uses them as structural components to emphasize certain events in the narration.

The first kiss, between Ana and her husband Don Víctor Quintanar, occurs in the third chapter of the first tome. It is a consequence of the first event that occurs in the novel: Ana's decision to change to el Magistral Don Fermín de Pas as her confessor. This first kiss occurs when Ana is reviewing her history and her conscience to prepare herself for her first general confession with Don Fermín. Consequently, it is not only

representative of the relationship between Ana and her husband, but also of Ana's character during the first part of the novel. Through the description of how she came to be the wife of Don Víctor, Ana is characterized as a woman trying to rise above the moral deficiency of her family and her past. The demanding moral code that she imposes on herself leads her to be known as "un ángel" (154; vol. 1) in *Vetusta*. She rededicates herself to the church by changing confessors, thus feeling that "ya no era mala" (174; vol. 1) and that she could be a good wife and woman for her husband. As part of this renewed self, Ana feels a heightened desire to become a mother, manifesting her desire to fill her spiritual void with religion and her physical void with children. However, her relationship with Don Víctor is portrayed as one between father and daughter more than husband and wife. The few manifestations of affection seen are "un casto beso" (174; vol. 1) given by Ana and "un beso paternal" (175; vol. 1) given by Don Víctor, both of which are deposited (174-5; vol. 1) on the forehead of the other spouse.

The first kiss of the series investigated here is the one on the lips between Ana and Don Víctor. Ana perceives herself as becoming a new person because her conscience is clean and ready for her confession, and she is ready to become a mother. She gives in to her physical desire and manipulates the moment of another paternal kiss in order to try to tempt her husband. As Don Víctor says goodnight, "él se inclinó para besarle la frente, pero ella echándole los brazos al cuello y hacia atrás la cabeza, recibió en los labios el beso. Don Víctor se puso un poco encarnado; sintió hervir la sangre. Pero no se atrevió" (177; vol. 1). The kiss, the only passionate kiss between the two characters described, can be interpreted as a synecdoche for their relationship. The unequal pairing of an emotional young woman

with a passive older man results in an unfulfilling relationship for her. In the kiss, the reader sees from the beginning that Ana's desire to have a productive sexual union that will make her a mother will remain unfulfilled by a husband who does not dare follow up on her initiative.

Furthermore, the timing and manner of the kiss reveal the beginning of Ana's confusion of spiritual desire and physical desire. Although sexual intercourse between husband and wife is not against the Catholic moral code, the fact that Ana's desire for a sexual relation with her husband comes at the moment when she is preparing herself for confession reveals her inability to choose between these two sides of herself. Her passion for a spiritual union with God becomes mixed up with her desire of a physical union. The rejection of the kiss by Don Víctor implies that Ana is unable to reconcile these two needs, even within the spiritual and physical union of matrimony. In her analysis of *La Regenta*, Sonia Núñez Puente proposes that "la insatisfacción constante del deseo dentro de la institución del matrimonio impulsa de manera continua a solicitar la gran experiencia, la 'gran pasión' en otro lugar" (152). Bourgeois society requires the repression of feminine passion in order for its patriarchal structure of authority to be maintained (161). Based upon this reading, it can be interpreted that the first kiss also represents Ana's realization that she must seek sexual and spiritual satisfaction outside of her marriage, leading her to the opposing paths of either religious devotion or adultery. These two options demonstrate Núñez Puente's argument that the great passion can be found only in directions that support the characterization of women as abnormal, unstable, and prone to fantasy (164). Ana's passion, either towards God or towards a man is therefore seen as perversion of bourgeois society since it

transcends the normal barriers of physical and spiritual desire. Her passion is an excess of the conventional passivity required of the bourgeois woman. This preliminary confrontation of Ana's spiritual and sexual yearnings becomes radicalized throughout the course of the novel, as her search for a great passion leads her away from herself and towards a corrupted sexuality (Núñez Puente 187). Núñez Puente, based upon her reading of Charles Fourier, argues that the repression of the passion impulse leads to the creation of a "contra-pasión" (189), or a perverted system of passion. In this sense, it could also be interpreted as an act that foreshadows the eventual downfall of the protagonist, for if she is not able to resolve her two desires within the institution of marriage, which is a spiritual and a physical union, her further attempts to find reconciliation outside of the accepted structure of matrimony will only continue to merge the spiritual and the physical in her mind. As Ana is tempted by both the religious path toward spiritual salvation and the path of adultery toward sexual satisfaction, the kisses symbolize the impossibility of a resolution. The fulfillment of her spiritual desires necessitates the betrayal of her physical desires; however her physical satisfaction also requires the betrayal of her spiritual conscience.

After the first kiss from her husband, which brings together both aspects of Ana, the other four come from representatives of either the spiritual or the sexual path toward the great passion. This dichotomy is polarized by the two leading male characters: Don Fermín, who symbolizes religion, and Don Álvaro Mesía who represents sexuality. Núñez Puente describes Fourier's theory which distinguishes between "la pasión antisocial presente en el espacio civilizado occidental y que es consecuencia de una imposibilidad de desarrollo pleno, y la pasión

desmedida, monstruosa la llama él [Fourier], fruto más que del orden burgués represor, del poder subvertido y negociado por las distintas estructuras sociales en términos foucaultianos" (187). In this sense, the two male protagonists can be interpreted as representatives of two separate social structures fighting for authority over the bourgeois society. Their struggle for control over Ana's conscience leads to the rest of the kisses of the series, each one marking a moment of triumph for one of the men. Ana oscillates like a pendulum between these two competing forces. James Mandrell remarks in his study of *La Regenta* that the female characters in several nineteenth century novels, including Ana Ozores, Anna Karenina and Madame Bovary, all exist in a constant state of desirousness caused by a need "to establish identity in relation to patriarchal power, in contradistinction to the male subject" (6). Based upon this interpretation, it is possible to consider religion and sexuality, and their representative characters, as two instruments of patriarchal power that determine Ana's identity. However, in the novel, Alas indicates that these two aspects of the patriarchy are really two opposing structures that cannot be united. Consequently, as Mandrell posits, Ana's attempts to escape the control of one or the other of the powers is "unpracticable" (23) and results in her societal and spiritual marginalization.

The second kiss is given to Ana by El Gran Constantino, Doña Petronila Rianzares in chapter 18 in the second tome. After transferring to Don Fermín as her confessor, Ana comes to consider Don Fermín her spiritual advisor and guide to leading a moral life. She becomes dependant on el Magistral as her desire to have children with her husband becomes gradually transformed into a sexual desire for Don Álvaro Mesía after he decides

to seduce her. The possibility of a productive sexual relationship with Ana's husband is shown to be impossible through repeated allusions to Don Víctor's impotence, leading Ana to seek sexual satisfaction with another man. The two men, both leaders of their respective sections of the Vetusta society, acknowledge each other as rivals for the control of Ana and the consequent control of the town in chapter 13. Ana, having unknowingly committed a sin by going to the theater the night before All Saint's Day, surrenders herself to the judgment of Don Fermín in atonement. She admits her inability to decide for herself which path to take saying: "Haré todo lo que usted manda; no ya por sumisión, por egoísmo, porque está visto que no sé disponer de mí; prefiero que me mande usted" (108; vol. 2). Don Fermín recognizes his moment of victory over Ana's sexuality and furthers her movement towards the domination of the spirit by advising her to withdraw from society and "entrar en la devota práctica" (108; vol. 2). Ana resolves to start a "vida nueva" (109; vol. 2) that privileges spiritual acts of charity over physical acts of love. Ana's search for her great passion through spirituality is now not her own, but is controlled by a representative of the very system that has suppressed it in the first place.

Don Fermín is the symbol of religion for the whole of Vetustan society, but especially for Ana after he becomes her confessor. However, Vetusta also recognizes that el Magistral uses his religious power for material gain, characterizing him as ambitious and greedy (282; vol. 1). Alas heightens this tension between the pious and the material aspects of Don Fermín by comparing him to the cathedral tower of the city (410; vol. 1). Don Fermín is powerful, but made of stone: he is not governed by his emotions but by the desire for authority. It is significant that

throughout the novel, Ana's symbol of religious purity is constantly shown to be impure, marked by the same confusion between the material and the spiritual that troubles Ana.

Her decision to dedicate herself to religion, and the current domination of the spiritual, is marked by a kiss on the forehead from Doña Petronila. The narrador describes that "fue un beso solemne, apretado, pero frío... Parecía poner allí el sello de una cofradía mojado en hielo" (109; vol. 2). Alas emphasizes with the word "cofradía", or brotherhood, that Ana has become part of the religious force of Vetusta, and the use of "sello", or seal, indicates that the kiss symbolizes her conversion to beatitude. The spiritual passion marks the excessive femininity of Ana's character: the docility and maternity necessary for charitable works are shown as extreme in the case of beatitude where the physicality of these actions is sublimated to the spiritual. In this instance, Doña Petronila functions not only as a representative of the devout catholic, but also as a substitute for Don Fermín. Several critics have noted that the character of Celedonio serves as a substitute for Don Fermín. For instance, John W. Kronik refers to Celedonio as "el doble" (523) of Don Fermín, while Stephanie Sieburth and Noël Valis have also commented on his role as a substitute. In the second kiss, Doña Petronila welcomes Ana to the devout life of charity works on behalf of Don Fermín. Don Fermín takes Ana by the hand, but due to his position as a member of the clergy, is unable to give her the symbolic kiss himself. When he signals Doña Petronila to be a "testigo" (109; vol. 2) of Ana's conversion, she immediately kisses Ana on the forehead. From this action, it can be seen that Don Fermín himself designates Doña Petronila as his substitute.

Additionally, the description of the kiss as cold and wet emphasizes that it comes from Don Fermín by foreshadowing the final kiss, from Celedonio, “viscoso y frío [como] de un sapo” (537; vol. 2). It is interesting to note that while many critics have analyzed the importance of the image of the toad and the perversion of the final kiss, none have investigated Doña Petronila’s kiss within that context. The two kisses reflect the importance of religion as a meaning for existence in Ana’s life. The kiss from Doña Petronila marks the beginning of her “vida nueva” governed by the church, and the kiss from Celedonio marks the end of that life and the beginning of another as Ana “volvió a la vida” (537; vol. 2) at Celedonio’s touch. In agreement with Valis’ argument that the toad in *La Regenta* is symbolic of “la maldad” (797), Doña Petronila’s kiss can be considered a perversion of the religious passion it represents. Both Ana herself and Don Fermín utilize Ana’s religious devotion towards ulterior motives. Don Fermín uses her in order to preserve his social power and status, whereas Ana uses religious works as a distraction to avoid her sexual temptation toward Don Álvaro. The grotesque nature of Doña Petronila’s kiss reflects this dual perversion of religious beliefs for material benefit. In this sense, this kiss can also be an echo of Judas’ kiss of betrayal toward Jesus Christ, whereby Judas exchanges potential spiritual salvation for monetary gain.

Consequently, Doña Petronila’s kiss can be shown to represent a betrayal of Ana by both herself and by Don Fermín. Ana betrays herself because she is relinquishing her freedom of choice by submitting to the authority of Don Fermín. More than becoming a productive member of the church and the Vetustan society, Ana unknowingly becomes an agent of Don Fermín’s power by joining Doña Petronila’s

sisterhood. Not only is her spirituality signaled by a physical action, but the illness she suffers immediately after her decision indicates to the reader that Ana has betrayed her physical body through her mystic devotion to el Magistral. As her weak physical condition causes Ana to enter into a heightened emotional state, she becomes more beautiful. Her privileging of the spiritual passion in order to control the physical is a betrayal of one side of herself and therefore leads to a heightened sexuality demonstrated by her physical beauty. Ana’s spirituality is presented as an abnormal path toward the great passion due to its extreme nature. For Ana’s character, religion is a mechanism of female repression similar to the institution of matrimony because both place her under the control of a man. Normally a symbol of romantic passion, the second kiss marks Ana’s spiritual fervor. Therefore, this kiss reflects Núñez Puente’s concept that repressed passion springs forth suddenly in a perverse form (195). As seen in the first kiss, Ana is unable to neither separate the spiritual from the physical nor find a balance between the two.

Moreover, the kiss can be interpreted as a betrayal by Don Fermín because he exercises his authority over Ana not for her spiritual salvation but for his personal gain. His control over Ana awards him a certain degree of control of the rest of the Vetustan society since Ana is seen as the exemplary model of virtue in the town. Her salvation from physical temptation by becoming a devout Catholic represents the societal salvation of el Magistral. Furthermore, although neither Don Fermín nor the reader are fully aware at this point, Don Fermín also has a physical interest in Ana, since he falls in love with her throughout the course of the novel. If Doña Petronila can be interpreted as a substitute for Don Fermín, this second kiss marks the beginning of Don Fermín amorous intentions

towards Ana. The kiss signifies his desire to use his spiritual control of Ana to gain control over her sexuality. Her spiritual submission to him leads to a grotesque physical contact, revealing the perverted nature of the spiritual conquest. Therefore, in this kiss the reader sees that the physical and the spiritual are intertwined not only for Ana but also for Don Fermín. It is important that Don Fermín, as the novel's representative of religion, however perverse he turns out to be, serves to emphasize the internal struggle of the protagonist instead of resolving it. At the moment of this second kiss, Alas makes clear that religion, like matrimony, will not let Ana access the great passion she desires.

The second kiss represents the consequences of the first real confrontation between Ana's physical desires and her spirituality. What can be originally seen as a momentary triumph of religion over sex is shown to be a perversion of spiritual devoutness. The narrator describes that "duró poco la eficacia de aquel impulso en que no había piedad acendrada sino gratitud, el deseo de complacer al hombre que tanto trabajaba por salvarla" (139; vol. 2), signaling that Ana's desire for spiritual purity is not founded in obligation towards God but is rather misdirected towards pleasing Don Fermín. Furthermore, Ana's decision to govern herself through religion begins a new life where her spirituality only masks her physical temptations without controlling them. Her emotional exaltation, fueled by repeated readings of the works of Santa Teresa de Jesús, forms the basis for a mystic spirituality, where her love of God becomes a physical and emotional experience. However, her solace in her mystic love of God is only temporary, as her loneliness is heightened by the thought that she will never experience earthly love.

The next kiss in the series illustrates the consequences of the physical path toward the great passion. The third kiss demonstrates the beginning of Ana's fall into adultery as she realizes that the religious path is unsatisfactory. Once again Ana's repression of her physical desire as she explores her spiritual passion causes the physical to spring forth with even greater force (Núñez Puente 195). Ana is kissed on two separate occasions by Doña Visitación and Doña Obdulia, but they will be discussed together since they both result from Don Álvaro's declaration of love to Ana (423, vol. 2). These kisses are more minor events in the novel than the kisses previously discussed, but they take on a more significant meaning if one interprets Visitación and Obdulia as substitutes for Don Álvaro. Just as Don Fermín has his female substitute in Doña Petronila, Visitación and Obdulia are presented as coconspirators in Don Álvaro's mission to conquer Ana. They are not only representatives of fallen women, but agents of Don Álvaro to enable the fall of more women since they directly manipulate Ana in order to assure his victory over her.

Although Don Álvaro only speaks of his love and Ana does not respond with her own declaration, her demeanor begins to change as she opens herself to the possibility of finding her great passion with Don Álvaro. The narrator describes that upon hearing Don Álvaro's declaration, "Ana sentía un placer puramente material [...] Sí, el placer era puramente material, pero su intensidad le hacía grandioso, sublime" (426; vol. 2, emphasis is from the original). Ana recognizes the foundation of her great passion, but it is a passion based solely in physical desire. The kisses from Obdulia and Visitación accentuate Don Álvaro's characterization as a symbol of physical desire and therefore

are markers of the triumph of physical over spiritual passion.

Visitación kisses Ana for the first time immediately after Don Álvaro's confession of love. She "sujetó a la Regenta por los hombros, le habló al oído, le llenó de besos estrepitosos la cara y corrió a su cuarto" (430, vol. 2). As a woman, she is able to cross the barrier between friendship and physical intimacy more easily than Don Álvaro, and her kisses therefore represent those that Don Álvaro was unable to give to a married woman due to societal constraints. Similar to Doña Petronila's kiss, it could be interpreted that Visitación is welcoming Ana into the group of women governed by physical passion instead of religious passion: the sisterhood of fallen women. The use of the word "estrepitosos", or deafening, signals this kiss as an excess of passion. Sieburth describes Visitación's kisses as "profane kisses" (89) that replace the religious kiss of Doña Petronila. When Ana is kissed by both Visitación and Obdulia, shortly after the fourth imagined kiss from Don Álvaro that will be discussed next in the series, the narrative voice reinforces the idea of a sisterhood of fallen women. The narrator describes that "todos parecían cómplices. Obdulia y Visitación adoraban a la Regenta, eran esclavas de sus caprichos, se la comían a besos; juraban que eran felices viéndola tan tratable, tan humanizada" (437; vol. 2, emphasis is from the original). Ana's change in personality is described here; her movement away from spiritual passion leads her to be humanized in the eyes of the other materialistic characters.

Additionally, the use of the term "cómplice" implies that these kisses are also indicators of a betrayal of Ana. Their feminine bond over their shared transgressions indicates that physical passion outside of marriage is necessary, but it is only socially acceptable while it remains secret,

inexplicit. The kisses given by these female characters are a way to manifest Don Álvaro's passion for her and her consequent inclusion in their group, without it being obvious to all. The use of Visitación and Obdulia as substitutes for the physical consummation of Ana's passion foreshadows the unsatisfactory nature of her physical relationship with Don Álvaro, symbolized in the next kiss.

The fourth kiss further demonstrates that Ana's search for the great passion leads to another excess, but this time on a mental instead of a physical level because it is a kiss which occurs only in Ana's imagination. The fourth kiss can therefore be interpreted as an example of a "proyección casi fantasmal de la gran pasión romántica" (179) that Núñez Puente proposes as a representation of the female transgressor. It marks the continuation of Ana's fall into the sin of adultery and a moment of triumph of her physical desires over her conscience. It is significant that the consummation of the physical desire between Ana and Don Álvaro is never explicitly described in the novel; the only mention of a kiss is of an event that has not happened. Because of this, the fourth kiss can also be interpreted as a betrayal of Ana by herself, because she denies her need for physical contact by imagining it. The fourth kiss, or more specifically, the lack of a fourth kiss, is the first moment where Ana distinguishes between her physical and her emotional needs, allowing the reader to perceive how they are combined in Ana's mind.

After the second kiss, which symbolizes religious passion, Ana's attraction to Don Álvaro is not mitigated through her religious devotion but accentuated as her divine love of God increases her desire for carnal love. Ana continues her religious education and practice, but her confusion between divine and earthly

love is revealed when she begins to consider Don Álvaro a rival of Jesus Christ for her affection. She recognizes this as a perversion of her religious beliefs, saying “Jesús, Jesús, tú no puedes tener un rival. Sería infame, sería asqueroso” (219; vol. 2), but she is unable to stop thinking of Don Álvaro during moments of spiritual contemplation. She is able to distance herself from her physical desires only by creating a mental separation between her soul and her body, allowing herself to think about Don Álvaro as a way to avoid committing a physical sin. It is possible to see clearly the separation of Ana’s physical and her mental or emotional fidelity to her husband when Ana describes that, to her husband, “se le debía el honor; y a pesar de tanta intimidación, de aquel amor confesado implícitamente, Ana podía decir que don Álvaro no había puesto sus labios en aquella piel con cuyo contacto soñaba de fijo” (436; vol. 2). Although later Ana does give in to her physical temptation for Don Álvaro, the only direct physical contact described between the two is this fourth kiss which Ana imagines. The kiss that occurs between Ana and the female representatives of Don Álvaro’s sexual power is a precursor to this imagined event. The fourth kiss is a clear example of Ana’s confusion between her emotional and her physical desires, since her first sexual contact with the representative of physical desire, Don Álvaro, occurs in her mind.

Alas emphasizes the role of Don Álvaro as a symbol for the physical pole of Ana’s identity when the narrator notes that Ana “ya no dudaba que aquel hombre representaba para ella la perdición, pero tampoco que estaba enamorada de él cuanto en ella había de mundano, carnal, frágil y perecedero” (245; vol. 2). It is clear that Ana’s physical self is continuously drawn toward Don Álvaro whereas her conscience is drawn towards Don Fermín as a path to

salvation. Throughout the novel, Don Álvaro is characterized as a materialist, for whom material value determines his existence. The narrator signals that Don Álvaro’s only method of controlling Ana is through physical contact, describing that he “creyó otra vez en la influencia del físico y se propuso estar al lado de Ana la mayor cantidad de tiempo posible” (129; vol. 2). It is ironic that his physical presence forces Ana to process her physical desire for him through mental fantasy. However, this confluence of mind and body can be attributed to the fact that, just as Don Fermín is a perversion of spiritual passion, Don Álvaro is a perversion of physical passion. He conquers women in order to establish his control over them, and maintain his superiority over the other men of Vetusta; there is no emotional love in his sexual conquests. The narrator indicates that Don Álvaro always uses women “por algo y para algo” (294; vol. 2). The distorted nature of his sexuality can be seen in the scene in the Casino where Don Álvaro decides to “inter[venir] en la algarazca para dar su dictamen tan lleno de experiencia en asuntos amorosos” (173; vol. 2) and reestablishes his authority regarding sex. The narrator describes the scene of master and disciples as reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci’s painting *The Last Supper*, revealing that Don Álvaro is not only a distortion of physical love, but also a perversion of religion. Don Álvaro is associated with religion because he seduces women away from the teaching of the church and forbids them to seek forgiveness for their sins through confession. In this way he keeps his conquests out of the control of Don Fermín, further manifesting their roles as opposing powers. Don Álvaro seeks to gain complete control over Ana, governing her spirit through his conquest of her body; similar to the way that Don Fermín seeks to control her body after she

submits her soul to him. Neither Don Álvaro nor Don Fermín is portrayed as a pure example of the pole each represents since each is seen as a distorted combination of both sex and religion.

The fourth kiss reveals not only the confluence of physicality and spirituality, but also marks a moment of triumph of the physical and of Don Álvaro. Ana decides to allow herself to succumb to Don Álvaro, and her fantasies are the next step towards its becoming a reality in the physical world. At the beginning of the second tome, Ana describes how she dreams of Don Álvaro almost every night, waking up with “el dejo amargo de las malas pasiones satisfechas” (18; vol. 2). At this moment, Ana is satisfied with the inexplicit declarations of love made in actuality by Don Álvaro since she is able to imagine a physical union, and is able to experience it indirectly through her physical contact with Doña Obdulia and Doña Visitación. Sieburth explains this lack of sexual contact by proposing that sex and language serve as substitutes for each other, and therefore cannot exist in the same event (93). However, it could also be interpreted that sex and religion, although combined in the mind of Ana, are shown to be irreconcilable forces. In addition, the statement that she must honor Don Víctor with her physical fidelity reflects the distinction between her body and her soul. Ana recognizes the social control that matrimony represents, but her ability to separate spiritual and physical passion also indicates her acknowledgement that marriage divides the spiritual connection from the sexual impulse (Núñez Puente 155). Ana deludes herself that imagined sins do not affect either her physical or spiritual purity, since they do not occur in the real world. However, the placement of this missing fourth kiss shows how Ana’s preoccupation with her physical needs begins to take over and undermine her decision

to remain pure. Immediately after Ana describes how she has remained faithful to Don Víctor, the narrator describes that:

La Regenta cayendo, cayendo era feliz; sentía el mareo de la caída en las entrañas, pero si algunos días al despertar en vez de pensamientos alegres encontraba, entre un poco de bilis, ideas tristes, algo como un remordimiento, pronto se curaba con la nueva metafísica naturalista que ella, sin darse cuenta de ello, había creado a última hora para satisfacer su afán invencible de llevar siempre a la abstracción, a la generalidad, los sucesos de vida. (437; vol. 2)

In this passage, the narrator makes explicit not only Ana’s fall, but also the physical consequences that even a mental submission to temptation can have. Her body reacts negatively to her fantasies, and the bile signals the distorted nature of her fall. Once again, Ana attempts to control her physical desires through mental effort, processing the events of her life as abstract occurrences. The physical effects of her mentally giving in to Don Álvaro can be interpreted to announce that the fall will soon be physically consummated as well.

It is important to note that Ana’s surrender to her temptation accentuates the physical desire of Don Fermín. In this sense, the fall of Ana is mirrored by the fall of Don Fermín, just as her turn to spirituality marked a rise in his power. Don Fermín, similar to Ana “cayendo, cayendo” (436; vol. 2) is “gozando, gozando, gozando” (224; vol. 2) his relationship with Ana. Ana’s inability to control her desire for Don Álvaro leads Don Fermín to inadvertently reveal his desire for Ana. When Ana realizes that el Magistral is in love with her, “enamorado como un hombre, no con el amor místico, ideal,

seráfico que ella se había figurado” (321-322; vol. 2), this revelation that shows Don Fermín as a perversion of religious faith again causes her to feel “[el] contacto de un cuerpo viscoso y frío” (322; vol. 2). This contact mirrors the grotesque sensation left by Doña Petronila’s kiss, reinforcing both her role as a substitute for Don Fermín and the corruption of both physical and spiritual purity through the combination of the two. Don Fermín’s love for Ana forces her to question her religious beliefs and be further tempted by Don Álvaro. However, she is still unable to commit the physical act of adultery, leading her instead to the extreme of physically expressing her spiritual faith by participating in the religious procession of Holy Friday. This action can be interpreted as one that links spiritual faith with physical fulfillment; Ana’s physical submission to religion therefore foreshadows her physical submission to her sexual desire.

In both the third kiss and the fourth kiss, Ana’s physical passion is not directly satisfied. It can be interpreted that this lack of physical satisfaction in the beginning moments of her fall indicates that adultery is also an unsustainable and therefore unsatisfactory means of finding her great passion. Ana does commit adultery and falls in love with Don Álvaro, but the circumstances of this passion put a limit to it. Ana is able to develop her passion only in secret, revealing, as Núñez Puente asserts, that bourgeois society considers passion as a perversion of the social order (187). Similar to religion and matrimony, adultery becomes another mechanism of the repression of female passion. Ana’s passion for Don Álvaro is not harmonious or equal since she is now under a mystic relationship that controls her body and soul. Once discovered, the extent to which it corrupts the social order is illustrated by Don

Álvaro’s killing of Don Víctor in the duel, and Ana’s subsequent exile from society. She now has exhausted all possible paths toward her great passion, and is unable to return even to the original legitimate dissatisfaction of marriage. Ana’s passion reveals the combination of the spiritual and the physical to be unstable.

Ana’s inability to find satisfaction is radicalized in the last kiss, occurring at the very end of the novel. Ana is now an exile in society, returning to an extreme version of the original state of enclosure and submission of marriage from which she was trying to break free. Ana, now deprived of her great passion, and abandoned both spiritually and physically by society at first attempts to find satisfaction within herself. However, the spiritual passion for God that Ana had repressed when she surrendered to her excessive physical passion springs forth again when she returns to the church for comfort. This decision is marked by a last kiss, closing the circle of Ana’s search for great passion by showing the impossibility of the religious passion already foreshadowed in Doña Petronila’s kiss. Ana uses religion as a way to finally resolve the tension between her physical and spiritual passions, asking God to give her the answer as to which is superior.

However, Alas shows that no such answer is possible because Ana’s religious fervor is demonstrated to be the most extreme perversion of passion in the last kiss. Towards the end of the novel, Don Fermín begins to consider himself Ana’s legitimate husband, and she his wife, “no ante Dios, no ante los hombres, ante ellos dos, ante él sobre todo, ante su amor” (464; vol. 2). Religion should be a legitimate method of experiencing passion, but through Don Fermín, Ana receives only a corrupted combination of spirituality and sexuality. Don Fermín’s carnal love of Ana undermines the purity of

the church and reveals that religious passion is not sustainable without decaying into physical passion. Don Fermín, as the representative of religion, abandons Ana to Celedonio, the symbol of perversion in both the beginning and the end of the novel. Celedonio, “el acólito afeminado, alto y escuálido” (536; vol. 2) is overcome by his own passion and kisses Ana. The novel ends with this description of the last kiss:

Celedonio sintió un deseo miserable, una perversión de la perversión de su lascivia; y por gozar un placer extraño, o por probar si lo gozaba, inclinó el rostro asqueroso sobre el de la Regenta y le besó los labios. Ana volvió a la vida rasgando las nieblas de un delirio que le causaba náusea. Había creído sentir sobre la boca el vientre viscoso y frío de un sapo. (537, vol. 2)

In this kiss, Ana’s last hope that Don Fermín will provide her with a model of how to experience her passion is denied when his true self and true intentions are revealed in Celedonio’s kiss. Every part of the kiss is perverse, grotesque, from the physical aspect of Celedonio to the sensation it creates both physically and emotionally for Ana. Additionally, this last kiss combines other aspects of the previous kisses from Don Fermín and Don Álvaro. Similar to Doña Petronila’s kiss, Celedonio’s kiss physically affects Ana; the nausea provoked by Celedonio can be seen as a radicalization of the bile inspired by Doña Petronila. Both are substitutes for Don Fermín, showing the corrupt nature of his desire for and control of Ana. The kiss also reflects the fantastical character of Don Álvaro’s kiss; Ana thinks she felt it but is unaware that it happened in actuality. Consequently, this last kiss can be seen as encapsulating Ana’s passion because its

perverseness causes Ana to repress it on both a physical and an emotional level.

Although the critics’ opinions regarding this last kiss vary in their interpretation, the majority agree that Celedonio is both a symbol of perversion and a substitute for Don Fermín. Based upon this reading of the character, Celedonio could be perceived as a representative of the grotesque nature of Don Fermín’s sexuality. This sexuality is perverse for several different reasons. Valis points out that the last kiss occurs in the Cathedral (797), making it a sacrilegious act that profanes not only the sacred space but the sacred person of the clergyman as well. In addition, Kronik notes that Celedonio has implied homosexual characteristics, which is seen in the nineteenth century Vetustan society as a corrupt sexuality (522). Like Ana, Don Fermín has confused and subsequently corrupted physical and spiritual passion, signified by the profanation of the church and of the heterosexual pairing approved by society in the character of Celedonio. Celedonio is, as the narrator describes, but a perversion of the already perverted Don Fermín.

Ana distorts both her physical and spiritual passion by combining the two. However, they are two irreconcilable forces even though they are linked by Ana’s mysticism, since the success of one requires a betrayal of the other (Valis 799). This last kiss, like those before it, can therefore be seen as a betrayal of Ana. Valis describes the paradox of the last kiss, noting that to the reader it seems both an inevitable end and “una gran traición” (795). The bourgeois society must punish Ana for her actions, but it is a spiritual instead of a physical chastisement. It can also be interpreted that Ana has betrayed herself with her final action in the novel. The narrative voice signals throughout that Don Fermín is corrupt and that religion will not

lead her to her great passion, but Ana continues to turn to both as a means of escape from her feelings of dissatisfaction and abandonment. After the last kiss, Ana returns to life, but is in a worse position than that in which she started. She has sacrificed not only herself, but also Don Fermín and Don Álvaro on her path to find her great passion. She is left with nothing but an echo of her corrupted passion, found in the kiss of the toad.

Ana's way of finding great passion through adultery lead not only to the distortion of that passion, but also to a degeneration of her position in Vetustan society. Ana, originally attempting to free herself from the repression of marriage, ends up imprisoning herself to an even greater extent within her own self. Through the characters of Don Álvaro and Don Fermín as symbols of the manipulation of physical and spiritual passion, the narrator indicates that adultery and religion are mechanisms like marriage in the repression of female passion. Ana's tendency towards the religious patriarchal system causes her to lose her status within the greater bourgeois society, and the reverse is also true since her beatitude interferes with her societal duties as wife and woman. Alas depicts two manifestations of patriarchal social order, neither of which is capable of allowing the woman to achieve her great passion. As Núñez Puente posits, the moral code of the bourgeois society functions only in theory; in practice it is unsustainable and unsatisfactory to its participants (195). The two representatives of this code in the novel are shown to be corrupt and unable to sustain even the moral codes which they have imposed upon themselves. Don Fermín and Don Álvaro are unsuccessful in their struggle for social authority because they too are unable to follow the rules of the structures they represent.

Ana's character shows that women are unable to escape the constraints of this moral code, both on its spiritual and physical levels. There is no possibility of happiness for the woman who desires to follow her great passion and find her own identity within society. Even in exile, Ana continues to try to affirm herself through the patriarchal structures of religion and marriage; she attempts to gain material wealth from her widowhood and spiritual wealth from the church. The use of kisses demonstrates that Ana must also be defined by her relationship to the patriarchal social order; it is an action that requires two people, showing that Ana cannot exist on her own.

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