

“Jugamos a la guerra”: Boys, Toys, and Military Masculinity in Galdós’s *La desheredada*

En el capítulo seis de La desheredada, de Benito Pérez Galdós, encontramos a niños jugando en la calle de un barrio pobre de Madrid. Pero lo que a primera vista parece ser una sencilla escena de los niños jugando a la guerra es, en realidad, una problematización de la masculinidad española. Este artículo sugiere que durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIX lo militar y lo masculino eran conceptos sinónimos. Sin embargo, Galdós no duda en criticar tal fusión, y lo hace convirtiendo el juego infantil en tragedia.

Palabras clave: *Galdós, La desheredada, masculinidad, militarismo, juguetes*

In the sixth chapter of Benito Pérez Galdós’s La desheredada, we find children at play in an impoverished neighborhood of Madrid. But what at first glance appears to be a simple representation of boys playing war is, upon closer inspection, a problematization of Spanish masculinity. This article suggests that the concepts of militarism and masculinity were synonymous throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Galdós, however, critiques this conflation by converting the children’s game into a tragedy.

Keywords: *Galdós, La desheredada, masculinity, militarism, toys*

¡Pobrecitas madres,
cuánto llorarán,
al ver que sus hijos
en la guerra están!

– Popular children’s song in Cádiz¹

Children’s play can seem so mundane that it is easy to forget the symbolic quality it has. But, as Johan Huizinga’s pithy declaration reminds us, “all play means something” (19). The sixth chapter of Benito Pérez Galdós’s *La desheredada* (1881) depicts a game so everyday, that any Madrid resident of the nineteenth century might have witnessed such an activity on a regular basis. Wielding broom handles, sticks, and their vivid imagination, a ragtag

group of boys marches down a street of southern Madrid, *jugando a la guerra*. Indeed, it seems likely that even modern readers will find the scene of boys playing war with sticks and stones familiar. But the reader's nostalgia for the days of youthful make-believe is short lived. Midway through the chapter sentimentality gives way to alarm when the innocent game takes a tragic turn, the play fighting escalating to real fighting before ending in a terrible act of violence.

I am hardly the first reader of *La desheredada* to find fertile ground in this episode. Until now most have focused on either the connections to the political context of the day, or on Galdós's literary technique. Peter Bly, for instance, interprets the references to General Juan Prim in chapter 6 as "a general parable of the political events of 1868-1870" (7), while Geoffrey Ribbans points to this chapter as an example of Galdós's burgeoning Naturalistic aesthetic. Perhaps the most extensive examinations of this scene can be found in Frank Durand's "The Reality of Illusion" and Laureano Bonet's paper "Juegos prohibidos." The former argues that Galdós's descriptions of boys playing war and Isidora's father in Leganés have a double purpose; on the one hand they fulfill the author's desire to create a compelling illusion of reality, and "on the other hand, they helped depict the structure of society" by critiquing Spain's current political situation (Durand 198). Bonet is interested in the allegorical elements of chapter 6, which he describes as a "bella e inquietante página galdosiana" (Bonet 141-42). He argues that the scene is representative of *La desheredada*'s status as a "libro 'fronterizo'" (165), that is, straddling Naturalist and Realist tendencies (or "*realismo sucio*" as he calls it) to create an allegory of the ideological divide, the so-called "la dualidad hispánica," that would eventually give rise to the Spanish Civil War (149). To these excellent studies I will add a modest proposal, namely, that chapter 6 should also be read as a commentary on the construction of masculinity in the nineteenth century. As has been argued elsewhere, Galdós's depictions of masculinity often subvert traditional gender norms.² Chapter 6 of *La desheredada* gives further evidence of this tendency. This article argues that, when examined against the backdrop of Spain's nascent toy industry and themes in juvenile literature and verse, chapter 6 of *La desheredada* problematizes Spanish masculinity by providing readers with an example of popular culture's tendency to militarize boys. In so doing, Galdós highlights the role of violence in the construction of masculinity, suggesting that the transition from boyhood to manhood flirts with danger and uncertainty, and perhaps should be viewed with apprehension rather than as a cause for celebration.

PRELUDE TO WAR

Not unlike a military commander's call to attention, chapter 6 demands the reader's attention with its curt title "¡Hombres!" (Pérez Galdós 143).³ But the simplicity of the word belies the complexity with which Galdós represents the topic of gender socialization in nineteenth-century Spain. Indeed, from the title to the final lines of the chapter, this depiction of boys-becoming-men is fraught with tension, hidden anxieties, and implied critiques, which play out in the chapter's central action, a mock battle that ends in real violence.

In the fourth paragraph of chapter 6 the narrator introduces Rafael, known to all as *Majito*, a handsome 10-year-old boy living in the slums of southern Madrid. It is a Sunday morning and *Majito* is looking for something to do. He ends up at the home of his friend Mariano, better known as *Pecado*, the younger brother of the novel's protagonist, Isidora. Rummaging through the meager possessions of *Pecado*, who is away at his job at the rope factory, *Majito* discovers a treasure trove of used military toys:

Era un rincón oscuro, polvoroso, lleno de cachivaches ... objetos de cartón, de cuero, de metal, algo como mochilas, bayonetas, cartucheras, trozos de arreos militares ... [*El Majito*] estuvo un rato en acecho, dudoso, mirando y eligiendo. Fuerte cosa era decidir cuál objeto tomaría. Por último, decidido, tiró de una brillante empuñadura y sacó un sable. (146)

This passage, with nouns aplenty and fewer verbs, invites the reader to gaze upon the material expression of lower-class boyhood. If, as Galdós stated in "La sociedad presente como materia novelable," the home is a reflection of the family that lives within (159), then *Pecado's* few possessions suggest that to be a boy in nineteenth-century Madrid is to be bellicose.⁴ Of all the "cachivaches" described, it is the toy saber that captures *Majito's* attention. The soldier's saber, popularized time and again in popular print, portraiture, and toys, is a charged symbol, one that dates back to before the nineteenth century. Since the Middle Ages, weapons have been linked with Spain's dominant ideologies as symbols of power and authority: "La caballería nació como un ideal de vida definido por su carácter militar como preparación para la guerra, por la condición nobiliaria de los caballeros y por su índole religiosa ... No es de extrañar que las armas adquirieran un marcado carácter simbólico dentro de ese universo ideológico" (Soler del Campo 25-26). Within this paradigm of symbols, the sword is the weapon most intimately connected to male power (Evangelista 571-72). At once phallic and iconic, the sword embodies bellicose masculinity more than any other object. Here the reference to the saber (the sword of choice for the

Spanish Calvary in the nineteenth century) evokes images of Prim atop his horse, saber in hand, leading the charge (see Figure 1).

In his purloined military costume, *Majito* eagerly takes on the appearance of Spain's greatest hero of the nineteenth century. To make the comparison with Prim more complete, *Majito* grabs one additional object before leaving *Pecado's* home, a *ros*, or military cap popularized by Antonio Ros de Olano, Prim, and other military figures during the *Guerra de África* (1859-60):

Después revolvió el conjunto y vio un brillo seductor de galeones. Diole un salto el corazón de ratero y tomó lo que brillaba. Era un sombrero que parecía escudilla, un ros de cartón, deforme, cuarteado, pero con tres tiras de papel dorado pegadas en redondo. *El Majito*, que tan poco sabía del mundo, sabía que los tres entorchados son la insignia del capitán general, y que esta es la jerarquía más alta del ejército. ¡Vaya usted a averiguar dónde esos diablos de chicos aprenden estas cosas! (146-47)

Where indeed? One can assume that the narrator's last statement is made tongue in cheek, because the truth is that military imagery was so pervasive during this period that it should come as no surprise that *Majito* knows exactly what a general's hat looks like.



Fig. 1. Francesc Sans i Cabot, *El general Prim en la Batalla de Tetuán* (1865), at Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.⁵

MAKING SOLDIERS

If one peruses the newspapers, novels, and portraiture of nineteenth-century Spain with an eye to discovering the gender norms of the period, they will find that these sources celebrated a life of adventure, exploration, and conquest as being the most in harmony with the ideals of traditional masculinity (McKinney, "How to Be a Man"). It is no coincidence that these qualities align with those associated with the military (Simón Alegre; Higate and Hopton 433). As Kimberly Hutchings remarks in her study of masculinity and war:

qualities such as aggression, rationality, or physical courage are identified both as an essential component of war and also of masculinity ... war plays a special role in anchoring the concept of masculinity, providing a fixed reference point for any negotiation or renegotiation of what masculinity or, in particular, *hegemonic masculinity* may mean. (389-90)

The tendency to define specific characteristics as inherent to a particular gender, as Judith Butler explains in her seminal work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, gives gender identities an ostensible coherence that makes them appear natural and stable (171-80). In this instance, by connecting aggression and courage to war *and* masculinity, bellicosity is made to seem inherently masculine and masculinity is made to seem bellicose. Well-known scholar of men's studies, Jeff Hearn, echoes Hutchings when he notes that the link between bellicosity and masculinity is so solid that they cannot be easily uncoupled:

It is an understatement to say that men, militarism and the military are historically, profoundly and blatantly interconnected ... Indeed, men and militarism are so obviously coupled, that it is hard to know where to start; it might seem gratuitous to labor the point. The very obviousness of this coupling ... can easily naturalize or normalize it. (Hearn 35-36)

In a period when gender-role socialization was especially intense, such norming of martial masculinity would not have gone unnoticed by boys growing up in Spain's urban centers. Boys wanted to be men, but not just any men. They wanted to be bullfighters and soldiers, the apotheoses of manliness in the nineteenth century. Given the bloody nature of these professions, violence – whether real or symbolic, whether performed directly or vicariously – was *de rigueur* for anyone hoping to be considered authentically manly.⁶

As a paragon of masculinity in the nineteenth century, the soldier was popularized in a variety of ways. Besides the ever-present iconography of war heroes that could be found in scores of military newspapers, portraits, decks of playing cards, as well as a smattering of monuments and statuary, there were other, more accessible sources for children like *Majito* and his friends. The most obvious of these was the budding toy industry. Like much of Europe, Spain began manufacturing toys in larger quantities at the beginning of the nineteenth century, coinciding with the rise of the middle class. The first lead soldiers in Spain were produced in the 1820s by Italian immigrants that had relocated to Barcelona – the most important of whom was Carlo Ortelli – followed a short time later by the considerably cheaper *soldaditos recortables*:

Así, el medio desde el cual se ha conocido, y se ha visto reproducido lo militar, de manera masiva mayoritaria y popular, ha sido el recortable, de tal manera que muy bien podríamos otorgar a este insignificante objeto el título de ser el primer medio de comunicación de masas que ha servido para acercar los ejércitos a la sociedad civil y, curiosamente, mediante una mecánica tan humana y gratificante como es la del juego infantil. (Francisco López 9)

The growing toy industry provided more than just lead and paper soldiers. As José Corredor-Matheos explains in his history of toys in Spain, boys did not simply want to play *with* soldiers, they wanted *to be* soldiers:

El niño no se limitaba a jugar a los soldaditos, sino que, en la pedida de sus posibilidades, quería desempeñar él mismo el papel de protagonista. La parafernalia, en estos casos, dependía de las posibilidades de los padres, y no siempre era tan sencilla como en los niños que jugaban a las guerras en las pinturas de Goya. Entonces ciertos talleres proporcionaban correaes, mochilas y armas. (108)

As we see in the *La desheredada*, when boys could not afford to buy toy weapons, they made them out of whatever was on hand. In an article titled “De los juegos infantiles” from the January, 1849 edition of *Museo de los Niños*, B. S. Castellanos offers the following observation about boys and toys:

Los niños, si bien se divierten también con las muñecas, su idolatría acaba siempre por destrozarlas, causando no pocas lágrimas a sus hermanitas o amigas algunas veces, y llevándoles su instinto varonil a los objetos peculiares a su sexo, el caballo de cartón o de madera, el sable de hojadelata [*sic*], el fusil y todos los aprestos de guerra ... son sus juguetes más favoritos, y por los cuales arrojan o abandonan sus muñecas al bello sexo. (11)

The message could not be clearer: dolls are for girls, weapons are for boys; girls nurture, boys attack. According to Corredor-Matheos, one compelling explanation as to why boys were so enamored with such objects may have been the protagonism enjoyed by the military during the period (110). From the Guerra de la Independencia against France to the wars of independence in the Americas, from the Guerras Carlistas to the numerous *pronunciamientos*, the military was constantly in the public eye. It is worth adding that it was not simply the ubiquity of *lo militar* in Spanish cities that attracted young boys, but the way militarism was publicly celebrated and admired.

Children's literature, although scarce until the final years of the nineteenth century, provides further examples of bellicose masculinity targeted at boys. We find this especially in the popular *aleluyas*, a precursor to the comic, known as *auques* in Cataluña, which consisted of a single-page of graphics (typically having 48 panels) with a unifying theme or narrative. There are numerous examples of martial-themed *aleluyas*, such as texts portraying historical or fictional accounts of battles, or the life of some notable military figure, such as Espartero (see Figure 2) or Prim (see Figure 3). According to Antonio Martín, who has studied the importance of *aleluyas* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "Es imposible comprender y valorar la importancia de las aleluyas y su impacto sobre los lectores ... [incluso] a los lectores menos cultos y generalmente iletrados" (Martín). For illiterate boys like *Majito* and his cohort, *aleluyas* such as these would have been highly accessible and therefore extremely effective in disseminating examples of masculine archetypes.

Less formal media such as popular nursery rhymes or songs with military themes would also play a role in spreading martial masculinity among Spain's youth. According to José Manuel Fraile Gil, a scholar of oral traditions, "Resulta muy curiosa la relación que puede establecerse entre las canciones de uso infantil y las de carácter militar" (34). Similarly, in her study of children's songs about war, "*Carta del Rey ha venido ... La guerra en el cancionero popular infantil hispánico*," María Jesús Ruiz notes that "es verdaderamente llamativa la presencia de lo militar en las canciones infantiles" (Ruiz 207). Speaking specifically about the nineteenth century, Ruiz notes that the Guerra de la Independencia and the Guerra de África figure heavily in children's songs (212-13). Although the verses that serve as an epigraph to this article highlight a somber aspect of military service, many of the examples cited in Ruiz's collection could be described as playful (214-26).



Fig. 2. *Historia del general Espartero* (1872), at Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid.



Fig. 3. *Vida del valiente general D. Juan Prim, marqués de los Castillejos* (1861), at Fundación Joaquín Díaz, Uruña, Valladolid.

To these examples we can add the presence of military-inspired activities in schools. According to education historians Xavier Torredadella Flix and Francisco Lagardera Otero, physical education in Spain was an invention of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie and drew on the military for its content.

In José Jorge de la Peña's essay on physical education, published in 1842, he lists the following as some of the recommended exercises for school-age boys: "la marcha militar, el ejercicio de fusil y sable, la lucha, la carrera, el salto, el trepar ... esgrima y algunos otros" (329). Such activities were seen as not only useful in fortifying boys' bodies, but also in fortifying and masculinizing the social body: "la incorporación de la educación premilitar ... consistía en la formación física de los jóvenes, con el objeto de fortalecer sentimientos y valores patrióticos, a la vez que mejorar y conservar la capacidad bélica de los ejércitos" (Torrebadella, *Gimnástica* 57).

Torrebadella explains that in addition to the jingoist concerns highlighted in many of these early arguments, gender norming clearly played a role in education reforms. At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a building concern in Spain that the nation was becoming increasingly effeminate: "Se decía que los padres habían abandonado a sus hijos a una educación afeminada y ridícula, que acostumbraba a muchos jóvenes a llevar una vida perezosa y sedentaria" (*Gimnástica* 27). By the end of the nineteenth century Spain, like other industrialized Western European nations, was experiencing "gender slippage and indifferentiation" to such a degree that some felt the nation was being threatened with "sexual anarchy" (Tsuchiya 112). In order to prevent a nation-wide crisis of masculinity, education reformers proposed incorporating martial-inspired exercises into the education system. In 1814, Félix González argued for the inclusion of military-style exercises in school as a way of combatting the "miserable afeminación" of Spanish society (Torrebadella, *Gimnástica* 52). In 1820, Juan Miguel Roth presented an initiative for the creation of a military gymnasium for youth in Barcelona, arguing that the pairing of traditional education with military-inspired calisthenics would foment a spirit of masculinity. In his proposal, Roth cited the role of the gymnasium in antiquity in maintaining a virile citizenry: "no solo evitaron con los continuos ejercicios corporales la afeminación de sus individuos, sino que consiguieron también endurecer a los jóvenes para resistir las penosas fatigas, cuya circunstancia es precisa para el servicio militar" (Torrebadella, *Gimnástica* 58). As Lagardera describes in his history of physical education in Spain, in 1881, the same year that *La desheredada* was published, Manuel Becerra argued in *las Cortes* for the establishment of physical education programs in public schools as a way of restoring "virilidad y fortaleza" to Spanish society: "en suma, habló de las prácticas físicas como una manifestación de progreso con el fin de contrapesar el afeminamiento que reportaba la civilización moderna" (Lagardera 85). The law passed the following year and included regulations for various curricular subjects, including "equitación y esgrima del palo, sable y fusil, y tiro al blanco" (85). Such militaristic pedagogies would reach

their climax at the end of the century with the formation of various *batallones infantiles* around the country (Otero Urtaza; Torrebadella, “Los batallones”).

A CALL TO ARMS

All this is to say that any boy *Majito's* age would have found it difficult to ignore the ubiquitous material of military culture. Even the poor, uneducated children of southern Madrid, who did not go to school, could not read, and did not have money for store-bought toys, would have felt the attraction; it was in the air, and anyone with eyes to see or ears to hear would have noticed that masculinity and soldiering went hand in hand. Small wonder that *Majito* is excited to find the sword and hat amongst Mariano's belongings: “Se puso el ros y vio que era bueno. Empuñó el sable” (Pérez Galdós 147). After heading out to the street with the saber and hat, *Majito's* comportment is transformed. Gone is the infantile behavior of the cute little boy described earlier as “un Niño Jesús vestido de torero” (144). He now has a gravitas about him: “*Majito* con el ros encasquetado, el sable en la derecha mano, en actitud tan belicosa, que si le viera el sultán de Marruecos convocara a toda su gente a la guerra santa ... se puso en la calle gritando con todo el vigor de su pecho infantil: ‘Soy *Plim*’” (147). The use of the adjective *infantil* and the comical mispronunciation of Prim's name contradict the boy's attempt at solemnity and remind us that this is, after all, just a boy playing make believe. This is the first of several juxtapositions in the chapter in which children act like men, only for the narrator to subsequently remind the reader that they are merely boys.

Majito's desire to be Prim, the narrator observes, is hardly unique: “¡Ser Prim! ¡Ilusión de los hijos del pueblo en los primeros albores de la ambición, cuando los instintos de gloria comienzan a despuntar en el alma, entre el torpe balbucir de la lengua y el retoñar, casi insensible, de las pasiones!” (148). As other kids join *Majito* in his military parade down the street, “No había uno que no quisiera ser Prim” (152). The type of imitation seen here is a key element of gender norming. Prim is not just any soldier, he is *the* military figure of the period and a paragon of Spanish masculinity, due to his military exploits as well as his political prominence and charisma. José del Corral describes Prim as “el ídolo de muchos españoles y la figura señera de las fuerzas armadas” (200). The discourse around the exploits of General Prim offers a clear example of the cult of hero-worship that was part and parcel of hegemonic masculinity in the second half of nineteenth-century Spain. Prim's perceived capacity to dominate his enemies, much like El Cid or the *conquistadores* of yesteryear, could be cited as evidence of Spain's inherent obsession with national virility, something that was believed to be

under threat ever since the arrival of the Borbones. In short, the military hero is “central to the Western cultural imagery of the masculine” (Connell 213).

Majito seems to have figures such as Prim or Espartero in mind as he walks purposefully down the street: “*El Majito* se dejó ir con grave paso por la calle de Moratines abajo ... avanzaba tieso y altanero, como hombre supinamente convencido de la importancia de sus funciones” (Pérez Galdós 148-49). The boy’s deliberate cadence gives his march an air of choreography that recalls Judith Butler’s comments on gender performativity, which she describes as the “corporeal stylization of gender,” through acts and gestures, which “produce [a gender identity] on the surface of the body” (Butler 172). The way in which *Majito* carries himself – “como hombre” – gently reminds the reader that masculinity is an identity performed on the culturally intelligible grids created by Spain’s gender discourse at the time.

Soon, more and more children begin to join the growing army. “Era una página de la historia contemporánea, puesta en aleluyas en un olvidado rincón de la capital. Fueran los niños hombres y las calles provincias” (Pérez Galdós 150). The metatextual reference here to *aleluyas* recalls the heroic depictions of military heroes cited above. In the final sentence, “fueran los niños hombres,” the use of imperfect subjunctive is yet another reminder that we are witnessing an imaginary scene, a simulacrum of bellicose manliness rather than the real thing.

In this rehearsal of military masculinity the passage hints at how gender identities are first modeled, then imitated, and finally re-enacted. This is how normative gender roles are perpetuated. Hegemonic masculinity sets itself up as the standard, the authentic. Anything less is a poor copy. Because hegemonic masculinity is based on a culturally exalted ideal, even men like Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, Hernán Cortés, or Juan Prim cannot compete with their mythologized reputations. Similarly, boys and men will never measure up to the hegemonic model, but will get caught in a vicious cycle, spending their lives trying to prove time and again that they are “real men.”

Also inherent in this concept of gender norming is the tension between biology and culture, between the natural and the constructed. On the one hand the spontaneity described in the passages above [“Instantáneamente, sin que se dieran órdenes ni se concertara cosa alguna” (Pérez Galdós 156-7)] and below suggests a certain degree of natural instinct, an example of the popular notion of essential differences that served as a framework for understanding gender roles in nineteenth-century Spain: “Y era digno de verse cómo se coordinaba poco a poco el menudo ejército; cómo sin prodigar órdenes se formaban columnas; cómo se eliminaba a las hembras,

aunque alguna hubo tan machorra que defendió a pescozones su puesto y jerarquía” (150). Bonet notes that this chapter, which is clearly in the Naturalist vein, certainly makes a case for determinism, although he admits that Galdós adds a “cierta levedad irónica,” which somewhat undermines the theory (Bonet 157). Likewise, Ribbans indicates that while the characters of this neighborhood, such as *Pecado*, are definitely “squeezed between an implacable heredity and a highly disadvantaged environment ... they do not determine his course of action” (Ribbans 797). In other words, the nature-nurture debate is far from clear in the novel and what at first glance appear to be instinctual behaviors could be explained as social conditioning without feeling that our reading is overly anachronistic.

Feminist theorists have convincingly argued that the gender roles we enact are not anchored in biology, as was previously believed, but in the social dictates of the time. But this relativity should not be mistaken for autonomy. According to Cindy Patton: “[Gender performativity] involves deployment of signs which have already attained meaning and/or standard usage within the legitimated discourse and crystallized practices of a ‘social’ [context]” (Patton 182). Medical, religious, and popular discourses provide a framework or grid, a gender wardrobe, so to speak, with which we dress ourselves and assume that it is natural, without ever realizing that the established norms of a given society limit the number of outfits available to us. Failure to wear the right costume can potentially lead to ridicule or worse. This is the case with the one girl who fails to obey the gendering of martial play; she is immediately labeled a *machorra* and must fight for inclusion, whereas the boys’ participation goes unquestioned (Pérez Galdós 150).

This first section of the chapter concludes with a touch of jingoism: “Con aquel lenguaje mudo decía claramente el infantil ejército: ‘¡Ya somos hombres!’ ¡Cuántas pupilas negras brillaban en el enjambre con destellos de genio y chispazos de iniciativa! ¡En cuántas actitudes se observaban pinitos de fiereza!” (151). Virtually every sentence is punctuated with exclamation points, suggesting a brimming potency. Moreover, the passage alludes to the process of becoming – of becoming citizens, but also of becoming men: “Somos granujas; no somos aún la humanidad, pero sí un croquis de ella. España, somos tus polluelos, y, cansados de jugar a los toros, jugamos a la guerra civil” (151). The declaration “¡Ya somos hombres!” suggests once again that the road to manhood is not simply a case of physical maturation but is traversed in part by imitating masculine paragons, and perhaps with the exception of bullfighters, there is no model of Spanish masculinity more obvious than the soldier. It should be pointed out that this militarization of masculinity cuts across class, although this chapter is definitely *also* a

commentary on class. A quick flip through the annals of history reveals that bellicose masculinity has always been admired in the West and endowed with cultural capital – just look at El Cid, the conquistadors, Prim, and other heroes. As Barry McCarthy notes in his description of the warrior ethos, virtually all societies in all historic periods view the warrior figure as an exemplar of masculine ideals (McCarthy 106). Spain is no exception. The conflation and celebration of masculinity and bellicosity transcends class, nationality, and other categories, even if these are always at play in the construction of gender identities.⁷

TOXIC MASCULINITY?

Up to this point the bellicosity of these children is purely symbolic and relatively innocent. Even when an argument breaks out and tensions grow, there is an element of humor and therefore of fun to the whole thing, such as when the boys begin bickering over who will lead the army:

Miá este – dijo uno de los chicos del carbonero, atacando al general en jefe con el codo, así como los pollos embisten con el ala ... Si no te callas, puñales, te pego la bofetá del siglo.

Pega, hombre, pega – chilló Rafael preparándose a recibirle, animoso, imponente, con el puño cerrado, y presentando también el codo y antebrazo como un escudo – . Vamos, hombre ...

Achúchale, achúchale – dijeron algunos que querían ver reñir al *Majito* con el hijo del carbonero. (Pérez Galdós 153)

It is at this point that the action begins to swing from fun to troublesome. Yes, the image of a ten-year-old delivering the *bofetada del siglo* is absurd to the point of being comical, and, in comparing the boys to squabbling chickens, the narrator diminishes the seriousness of the scrap. Nevertheless, the speed with which they turn to violence to settle disagreements is disconcerting. Even the use of the word *hombre* here, normally so common and generic, begins to feel loaded and menacing, as if it is a provocation, a challenge hurled from one boy to another to step up and prove his masculinity through violence. But just when the bravado threatens to boil over, the conflict comes to an abrupt end with the arrival of two new boys who show up with sweets for sale. Once again, we are reminded that these are mere children, not men, and they prefer treats to fisticuffs.

The peace is short lived, however, as the fighting breaks out again when one of the new boys, *Zarapicos*, grabs hold of the *ros*. Just as military uniforms depict rank, the hat is clearly a symbol of power for the boys, and

the effort to claim it confirms a claim made by many scholars of masculinity: that hierarchies and competitiveness are at the core of hegemonic masculinity in many cultures (Brittan 77-107; Walker 389; Connell 76-81; Kimmel 34). In other words, proving one's manliness entails not merely the subordination of women, but also an unending desire to achieve dominion over other men. It is little surprise that the boys come to blows over the emblematic object as they jostle for power. *Majito* launches the first rock, but soon they all join in:

Instantáneamente, sin que se dieran órdenes ni se concertara cosa alguna, generalizóse la pelea. Muchos se pasaron al bando del *Majito*, sin darse la razón de ello; otros permanecieron abajo, y todos tiraban, soldados bravos, saliendo a la primera fila y desafiando el proyectil que venía. Bajarse, elegir el guijarro, cogerlo, hacer el molinete con el brazo y lanzarlo, eran movimientos que se hacían con una celeridad inconcebible. (Pérez Galdós 156-57)

The narrator's playful tone fades for a moment as he assumes the mantle of objective war chronicler. The scene is ripe for heroics, as if one of the boys might step up and become the protagonist of his own *aleluya*. "Más enfurecidos ellos cuanto mayor era el número de los que se retiraban contusos, se atacaban con creciente furor. Estaban rojos ... Morir matando era su ilusión. Estaban ebrios, y los más intrépidos se reían de los pucheros de los desanimados" (158). But there will be no heroes in this tale. Just as quickly as the conflict began it comes to a halt with the arrival of a new player, *Pecado*, the true owner of the *ros*.

At the age of thirteen *Pecado* is on the cusp of manhood. He already has a job, and the text notes that he is "un muchacho fornido, rechoncho," who is "respetado y temido por su fuerza casi varonil, por su descaro, por su destreza en artes guerreras" (158-59). Again, the link between manliness and violence is unambiguous. When *Pecado* sees *Zarapicos* with the *ros*, the two boys square up and it becomes obvious that a new battle is imminent. As *Pecado* stands with arms akimbo the tone of the chapter becomes ominous. The *hijo del carbonero's* claim that he would deliver the *bofetada del siglo* was laughable, yet *Pecado* seems alarmingly capable of delivering on his threats: "¿Sabes lo que te digo? ... que si no sueltas el *ros* te reviento a patás" (159).

Pecado and *Zarapicos* launch into a one-on-one battle – "Lucharon, ¡ay!, con varonil fiereza" (Pérez Galdós 160). Here there is nothing in the narrator's tone to suggest that the use of the term *varonil* is meant to be ironic. The fight is intense, with each boy gaining and then losing the advantage: "Las bofetadas se sucedían a las bofetadas, los porrazos a los

porrazos. De cada golpe se inflaba un carrillo. Trabados al fin de manos y brazos, cayeron rodando" (160). As they fall to the ground *Pecado* ends up on top and begins to rain down blows on the pinned combatant: "*Zarapicos* debajo, *Pecado* encima. *Pecado* vencía, y machacó sobre su víctima con ferocidad. El niño rabioso supera en barbarie al hombre" (160). Despite the ferocity of the fight, the narrator reminds the reader that *Pecado* is a *niño rabioso* and not a man, in what will turn out to be a meaningful juxtaposition. In a final act of defiance *Zarapicos* bites down on one of *Pecado*'s fingers and then insults his mother. Blind with rage, *Pecado* pulls a blade from his waistband and knifes *Zarapicos*. The description once again highlights the boyhood-manhood transformation: "Sacó de la cintura una navajilla, cortaplumas o cosa parecida, un pedazo de acero que hasta entonces había sido juguete, y con él atacó a *Zarapicos*. Del golpe, el infeliz chiquillo cayó seco. ¡Hombres ya!" (160-61). Just as a toy is transformed into a weapon, so too is a boy transformed into a man when *Pecado* stabs *Zarapicos*. The last two words are arguably the most charged of the entire chapter. Until now the boys had been playing at being men, but it seemed clear that it was simply an imitation, a harmless game. With this single act of violence *Pecado* has crossed the threshold dividing boyhood and manhood, showing that the line between play and reality is often razor thin. With his exclamation "¡Hombres ya!" the narrator suggests that violence is not just part of what makes a man, it is the key ingredient.

A FAREWELL TO ARMS

Unlike the military chronicles that celebrate heroic acts of violence in the name of God and country, this scene is nothing but tragic. The death of a boy, the loss of innocence, and the failure of a society to prevent it are encapsulated in the thrust of that "arma que había sido juguete" (Pérez Galdós 161). Some have interpreted the violent conclusion of this chapter, and especially the development of *Pecado*, as emblematic of the Naturalist enterprise, a commentary on the harsh environs of the so-called *cuarto estado* and how they relate to theories of determinism (Ribbans 797; Bonet 157-64). I do not disagree with such interpretations. But as I have argued here, this chapter should also be read as a commentary on gender, particularly on the way that society formulates traditional masculinity so as to include a proclivity for violence.

If, as Roger Caillois suggests in his classic study of play and culture, *Man, Play, and Games*, the way we play is a direct response to the qualities of our society, then what might we conclude from the war play in chapter 6 of *La desheredada*? I contend that in depicting the way that boys imitate men and in focusing on the masculinity-war link, Galdós highlights the

constructedness of masculinity and problematizes gender socialization. There is no “happily ever after” in this story of boys-becoming-men, only the misfortune of childhoods cut too short. Bonet suggests that Galdós’s allegory of boys playing war is perhaps overly didactic (154). But maybe the continued appeal of the chapter for scholars and readers alike is that this moralistic approach remains salient even today. The gendering of toys continues both in Spain and abroad, and military toys, especially toy weapons, are marketed almost exclusively to boys.⁸ This suggests that our tendency to use material culture as a categorizing tool has yet to evolve past a traditional binary view of gender. Chapter 6 remains a relevant tale more than a century after its publication. At the risk of repeating Galdós’s heavy-handed didacticism, I close with some verses from “No a los juguetes feos” by another Spanish writer, Gloria Fuertes, whose centenary we recently celebrated:

Los juguetes son para jugar a jugar
 (de verdad)
 No para jugar a matar
 (de mentira) ...
 La pistolas (ni de agua)
 El revólver (ni de broma)
 La escopeta (ni tocarla).
 Los juguetes para todo.
 Y las armas para nada. (16)

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NOTES

- 1 For this song, titled “En el Barranco del Lobo” (226), and other children’s songs dealing with war, see María Jesús Ruiz’s “*Carta del Rey ha venido ... La guerra en el cancionero popular infantil hispánico.*”
- 2 Alan Smith, for instance, argues that the eponymous protagonist of *Nazarín* possesses both masculine and feminine qualities, contributing to his status as a Christ figure. Mark Harpring examines *La incógnita*, arguing that the protagonist’s inability to maintain a fixed position within the established gender binary reflects Spain’s failing political system. I have suggested that Galdós’s representation of the effeminate Nazarín and the masculine Ándara is tantamount to a literary genderfuck, and can be read as undermining the positivist belief that truth or knowledge about the Other comes from the

observation of external phenomena (McKinney *Mapping* 136-57). In her essay “¿Pero no ves que es marica?’ Maxi Rubín and Male Gender/Sexual Deviance in *Fortunata y Jacinta*,” Eva Copeland asserts that Galdós creates space for modern homosexual subjects by questioning “stable” notions of male gender and sexuality in his depiction of Maximiliano Rubín. Like Smith and McKinney, Ismael Souto Rumbo also finds fruitful possibilities in the ambiguous protagonist of *Nazarín*. By focusing on the links between gender and religion, he suggests that Galdós renegotiates the meaning of masculinity by creating a form of “masculinidad religiosa” (Souto Rumbo, “Religión” 156). Following McKinney (*Mapping* 95-108), Souto Rumbo argues elsewhere that Galdós’s depiction of middle-class masculinity in *Tormento* shows how the construction of hegemonic masculinity was flawed and in need of reform (“Masculinidad”). Finally, Akiko Tsuchiya’s classic study of gender deviance in Spanish literature, *Marginal Subjects: Gender and Deviance in Fin-de-siècle Spain*, examines several cases of female deviancy in Galdós’s work as well as examples of male deviancy in the novels of Clarín and Pardo Bazán.

- 3 All quotations by Galdós are from *La desheredada*, unless otherwise noted.
- 4 For a detailed examination on the role of homes in the construction of middle-class identities during this period see Jesús Cruz’s *The Rise of Middle-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spain*, especially chapter 3.
- 5 Galdós was familiar with the painting, although not necessarily a fan, as we see in *Memorias de un desmemoriado* (140-41).
- 6 Then again, this has always been the case in Spain, where national identity was tied to the heroic and divinely-ordained acts of violence of the *Reconquista* and the conquest of the Americas (McKinney, “How to Be a Man” 149-52; Connell 187). In other words, a “real man,” so the thinking goes, is forged in specific spaces (the battlefield, the frontier, the sporting arena) and tempered, tried and toughened by combat, training and other “hard and heavy phenomena” that are closely associated with traditional masculinity (Tiger 211).
- 7 Although this intersection of violence and masculinity crosses class lines, the level of interpenetration between the two varies. At one extreme is working-class (hyper)masculinity. Working-class men were viewed through the lens of Lombroso’s theories of atavism and were thought to exist in a more primitive and naturally violent condition (McKinney, *Mapping*). On the other end was the *hombre de buen tono*, a model of “refined masculinity” found in polite society, who was expected to shun direct violence (McKinney, “How to Be a Man” 147-48; 160-61). But according to the hegemonic model of masculinity *en vogue* at the time, which I have previously dubbed “respectable masculinity,” the ideal was somewhere in between, a “Goldilocks model of masculinity that sought to straddle the middle ground” between rough and refined models of

- manliness (148). This translated into “restrained violence,” or violence within the limits of warfare, dueling, and organized sport (161).
- 8 In their 2012 study of toys sold through the Disney store website, Auster and Mansbach discovered that 100% of toy weapons were classified as boys’ toys (382). Similarly, Martínez, Nicolás and Salas found that toy advertisements in Spain between 2009 and 2012 shows clear category gendering. Also from 2012, an article in *El País* notes that in Spain the toy industry continues to show “las típicas imágenes de niñas princesas y niños guerreros” (Castillo).

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