

A Madhouse of One's own.
**The representation of mad women as a strategy of subversion
and poetological stimulus in the novels of Emilia Pardo Bazán**

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As a cultural commonplace, pathology in general and madness in particular have been equated with femininity. Since ancient medicine, the female reproductive system has been defined as a principal origin of both physical and psychological insanity.

This definition gains particular importance during the 19th century in which medicine is declared to a leading discourse and – significantly - the idea of the pathological female is persistently kept up.

Male Spanish novelists – Pérez Galdós, Clarín among others -, adopting medical themes as a strategy to gain poetological authorization, seem to cement the medical image of the woman: The depiction of female madness constitutes a final step to silence and ruin their female figures.

Emilia Pardo Bazán, as my contribution intends to point out, adopts an opposite attitude towards medical and (male) literary authorities:

Her heroines' madness can be understood, on the one hand, as a subversive strategy to constitute female identity within patriarchal hegemony.

On the other hand, as described in the final chapter of her novel *Dulce dueño*, the constitution of femininity in the code of madness takes a poetological dimension: Locked up in a madhouse, the protagonist Lina happily begins to write down her experiences which form the present novel, converting – in the sense of Virginia Woolf's famous dictum - her cell into a madhouse of her own.

Consequently, my contribution will try to interpret Emilia Pardo Bazán's depiction of female madness as a *mise en abyme* of the author's general poetological concept.