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The Function of Desire  
In the Legends of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

By  
Kimberly A. Aaron

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science  
In  
Spanish

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

August, 2012

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The Function of Desire in the Legends of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

Kimberly A. Aaron

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the thesis committee.

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Dr. James Grabowska, Chair

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Dr. Gregory Taylor

To those who yearn for the ineffable

“If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy,  
the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.”

-C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

## ABSTRACT

## The Function of Desire in the Legends of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

By Kimberly A. Aaron  
Master of Science in Spanish  
Minnesota State University Mankato, 2012

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the function of desire in the legends of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. In ten of the fifteen legends, the protagonists are led by a misguided desire for something out of the ordinary, rejecting societal norms or common sense, to the point of self- and other-destructiveness. The protagonists create false realities for themselves in which they believe they will be able to conquer their desires with no consequences to themselves or to others.

Analyses of desire by psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, philosopher David Hume, and other theologians and thinkers informed this work. While philosopher and literary critic René Girard's triangle model for desire serves a launching point for the discussion, the case can be made from a close examination of the legends themselves.

The pattern in each legend is based upon the protagonist fixating upon an impossible object of desire, then temporarily transferring that desire to and pursuing a secondary, representative object. Finally, the uncanny and uncomfortable transposition of human desire to physical objects backfires as nature itself and the underworld turn predator into prey, consuming myth as spiritual forces violently counter human designs to control them.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### The Pervasive Force of Desire

The theme of desire is pervasive in the prose of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. A significant number of protagonists in the legends of Bécquer embark on a pursuit for unrealistic objects of desire, going against societal or natural norms. Instead of realizing their desire, however, these characters suffer consequences of disillusionment, insanity, or even death.

Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer was born in Seville, Spain in 1836, the fifth of eight sons born to painter José Domínguez Bécquer and Joaquina Bastida (Montesinos 14). His father died in 1841, and his mother died shortly thereafter in 1847, leaving Bécquer an orphan from a young age (Estruch Tobella 44). While some might argue that Bécquer pertains to a post-Romantic movement since he wrote more during the middle of the 19th century, his literature is characterized by Romantic themes and protagonists. Romanticism is closely related to rebellion and changes in cultural codes; this study will show how all the protagonists of Bécquer's legends follow their own paths, rebelling against societal norms and pursuing their own desires (Schuriknight x). Though Bécquer himself only lived to be 34 years old, he was a prolific writer whose legends and poems, especially, have been analyzed and admired internationally.

I am interested in the study of desire because it is a potent feeling that every human being shares whether they yearn for things on this earth or for

things eternal. I have been affected by the writings of C.S. Lewis and John Piper who conclude that pursuing one's own lasting satisfaction is not something to be condemned in and of itself. They argue, rather, that worldly objects of desire will always fall short, therefore humans need to seek their ultimate satisfaction by a relationship with God. Though this is not a theological study of Bécquer's legends, the basic principles remain: although the objects with which people attempt to satisfy their desires differ, the root of these pursuits is an emptiness inside and a propensity to fill it.

There is need for a study on the pervasive force of desire as it tempts humans toward self-destructive behavior instead of behavior that might lead to satisfaction in mundane or even in divine terms. This study seeks to identify the instances where desire for something unattainable compels the protagonist to act in a way contrary to what would be advisable, in hopes of achieving the object of their desire, but ultimately at their own expense. Unrealistic yearnings are the force behind the protagonists' actions that lead them to suffer consequences as a result of going against natural and societal laws.

The protagonists of G. A. Bécquer's legends first fixate upon unrealistic desires, then pursue an illusion by transferring their desires to a secondary object they believe will bring them closer to obtaining the principal object, and finally suffer tragedy and punishment for their foolhardy actions. In addition to noting that a pattern exists in relation to the protagonist's desires, actions, and punishing consequences, it is necessary to



examine who those protagonists are. We must also look at what is rejected, then oppositely at what is embraced, over the duration of each legend.

Analysis of the pattern in each legend reveals significance about the collective whole.

Regarding the profile of the subjects or protagonists of these legends, only about half are portrayed as Spanish nobility. The subject is just as often a middle- or low-class member of society. The subjects who are not of high-class or noble status are named by the narrator to be military captains or knights, musicians, servants, foreigners, and orphans. Clearly, Bécquer does not limit the human desire for “something out of the ordinary” based on social status. The yearnings of the noble protagonists are just as strong and reckless as those of any other protagonists, showing that even the most advantaged people in society are still lacking, wanting, and pursuing objects that endanger their well-being. This is important since unrealistic desires and man-made attempts to achieve them pervade class, gender, age, and nationality; it is a universal condition presented here in the legends as a particularly Spanish ailment. A distinction must be made, however, in that not *every* human being in the legends seeks what cannot be had. The majority of those represented in society in the legends follow the pre-determined rules for conduct, as seen in the behavior of the secondary characters of the legends who provide the warnings and respect the mysterious, “otherworldly” forces able to punish. The legends are named thus because

societal realities and popular, legendary, fantastic events are forced to share a “stage.”

Significance lies in what these protagonists reject as well as what they embrace. In eight of the ten legends discussed, either the protagonist verbalizes his or her own better judgement in the face of the situation, articulating common sense, or else an outsider provides the voice of reason, begging that the protagonist heed their words of warning. Whether the voice of reason comes from within the protagonist first or from a concerned outsider, the warning is promptly ignored and the protagonist plunges ahead into a dangerous situation that could have been avoided. Advice or better judgement is clearly rejected by the protagonists in the case of each legend and the fantastical allure of otherworldliness captures the souls of these protagonists.

In addition to disregarding warnings and common sense, these protagonists reject societal norms. This is what makes these protagonists Romantic heroes. For example, the protagonists do not settle for spouses who would desire them back, spouses of their own social class, or even spouses that truly exist in flesh and blood, in some cases. They long for what is unavailable to them either because of societal rules based on religion or social class or because the woman is a pure fantasy or spiritual projection, a typical portrait of the Romantic hero (Diaz-Plaja 105). Rebellion was an important theme in Romantic literature, as the literary movement itself was a rebellion against Neoclassicism and the repressed, conservative culture in

Spain that lasted until the death of Fernando VII in 1833 (Tapia 3). The death of this oppressive king was one of the events that made way for new literary voices influenced by France and other parts of Europe, that boasted marginalized and rebellious protagonists who did not adhere to the laws of traditional or conservative society (Flitter 48). The Romantic hero was oftentimes an afflicted person, passionate, dissatisfied with the status quo, yet destined to face or cause destruction. All of these characteristics are present in the protagonists of Bécquer's legends, making his characters archetypal representations of the Romantic hero or central figure.

This investigation will not include analysis of the poems or other prose of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, but rather keep the focus narrow and uniform within one genre of Bécquer, and focus on his legends. Though Bécquer grapples with themes of longing, woman, the ineffable, and death in his legends, all themes seen in his poetry and other prose as well, the legends of Bécquer have a different function (Aguirre 28). Legends deal with the mythical, fantastical, or supernatural, which introduces the element of good and evil. Also, the legends provide a more detailed narrative, a storyline with the development of characters and a plot, that lure the reader into a deeper investment in the work. Just as the protagonists are lured to their fate by a desire to know the unknown, the reader similarly follows his or her curiosity to the end of the text, and is both captivated and appalled upon arriving at the climax of the legend. Bécquer's legends provide his reader with a similar ride through the physical and spiritual realms of the unknown. The reader's

curiosity for what happens propels him or her to keep reading, just as the protagonist's curiosity propels him or her forward in the quest. The analysis is limited to the legends of Bécquer because these short narratives provide an added sense of intrigue over the unknown spiritual world and danger for the reader.

To this end I have selected ten of the fifteen legends written by Bécquer that demonstrate the same pattern in the function of desire. This is not an exhaustive study, but it serves as a model for analyzing desire as the motivating factor behind the actions of the protagonists in these legends. I will describe two legends, *El Monte de las Ánimas* and *La ajorca de oro* in greater detail to set up the model for how desire functions in these and the remaining eight legends as well.

The five legends I will not analyze here are *Creed en Dios*, *La rosa de la pasión*, *La promesa*, *La cruz del diablo*, and *El Cristo de la Calavera*. The reason I did not select these is either because a transfer of desire to the secondary object is not seen in the three legends fueled by desire, or in the case of the other two, desire is not the main motivator behind the plot and action. These five legends have lessons that advise the reader in the same way as the others, stemming from the same moral sensibilities, but they do not share a pattern in the function of desire. These legends lack that pattern and must be analyzed differently. The reason Bécquer treated these legends differently will be left for a future study on the topic.

I approached this project first and foremost with a careful reading of the legends of Bécquer, asking myself what patterns were evident in terms of how desire seemed to function in each legend. The common theme throughout all the legends was a pursuit of something out of the ordinary. A pattern began to emerge in the relationships between one protagonist and another, or between a protagonist and an object, and that relationship was always fueled by desire. It then became clear that the force that always brought about the protagonists' punishment was that of the supernatural or the underworld.

After establishing patterns in the legends, I needed to conduct further research on the concept of desire. I familiarized myself with Lacanian and Freudian thought. Psychoanalytical studies of these legends indeed shed light on the psyche of the protagonists, their irrational thought processes, and the imaginary reality their desires caused them to create and operate within, but I determined that there was more to this study than would be satisfied by a purely psychoanalytical approach. I turned to more philosophical approaches to desire, such as models put forth by René Girard and David Hume.

My analysis is not based upon one specific literary theory or critical approach, but is more eclectic in nature as I broached a variety of questions as I analyzed the texts. A structuralist approach allowed me to consider the significance of the relationships between protagonists and their objects of desire and protagonists and their transferred object of desire. The meaning lies in the interplay between the two, not in the essence of any object in and

of itself. Similarly, a semiotic analysis helped me to understand the symbolism of the objects involved in the protagonists' longings. Psychoanalysis provided a framework for dealing with the psyche and the irrational or imaginary beliefs of the protagonists. So, by looking at the time period and literary movement in which Bécquer wrote, one that we recognize as Romanticism, contributes to the overall understanding of the protagonists' priorities and actions. Social-historical literary theory, while useful in trying to make cultural and historical connections, was less profitable than existentialism, which pointed to a discussion of protagonists who follow their own individual code of ethics versus a standard moral or societal norm. I do not conclude from Bécquer's legends, however, that there is no inherent human truth, value, or meaning, as true existentialism would claim. Rather, I focused on the questions this theoretical approach allowed in terms of analysis. Ultimately, my method focused on a close reading of the text.

Chapter two contains a review of literature that sets the stage for analysis of the function of desire as it relates to previous research in the field and my topic. There is a gap that remains to be filled in critical literary studies pertaining to the recurring theme of desire in the legends of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, and I provide background, framework, and significance of the function of desire in the legends. The third chapter is based on my research and arguments articulated in the review of literature, as I point out additional avenues of study that have not been fully explored. This chapter

sets up a model by which to analyze the protagonists' actions and consequences in Bécquer's legends, and will then hold each of the ten legends up against that model in order to prove the existing pattern. I conclude the study in chapter four by summarizing the pertinent results of the analysis in an attempt to summarize the function of desire and its pertinence to understanding Bécquer's worldview as proposed in the legends. In some ways analysis leads to an understanding of the human condition and the very nature of humanity's urge to choose individual desire over societal or divine will. The legends certainly propose that individuals have free will to reject common sense and to pursue, no matter how foolish, their own obsessions and desires. The legends also prove relentlessly that this attractive allure is also the first step toward perdition and the underworld.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Toward a Model for Analysis: Critical Approaches and Desire**

The purpose of this study is to provide a careful reading of the legends of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer in order to effectively analyze the role of desire in the actions and behaviors of the protagonists. The outcomes of the protagonists' pursuits will also be analyzed for implications about the function of desire. Various theoretical models of desire, such as those of René Girard and David Hume have been used to provide a definition of desire and to provide insight into the reading of the texts and an analysis of the protagonists' quests.

Many scholars have recognized the theme of desire in the legends of Bécquer, but only Gari J. LaGuardia has put forth a study specifically on the concept of desire in his dissertation, "The Dialectic of Desire in Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer: A Psychoanalytical Study." Others have focused more on the objects of the protagonists' desires rather than the implications of the results of the quests to pursue those desires. For example, Manuela Cubero-Sanz, María del Rosario Delgado-Suarez, Melvy Portocarrero, and Wallace Woolsey have grappled with the role of the woman, a very prevalent object of desire, in the poetry and prose of Bécquer, as the symbol or manifestation of desire. Bécquer certainly does use the idea of physical attraction to a beautiful woman as a manifestation of desire throughout his works, but it is also



important to look more generally at the function of desire, not just at the targets desired. This study will concentrate on the motivation behind these characters' pursuits, how they go about pursuing their desires, what happens to them, and why that is significant.

Gari LaGuardia's psychoanalytic study from 1975 is the only "current" look at the theme of desire specifically as it relates to Bécquer's legends. LaGuardia devotes his second chapter to the legends in general. LaGuardia argues that "the field of signifiers of desire is sparse, and while my own figurative construct of 'masochism' is perhaps not always the 'signifier' of choice, it nevertheless occupies a central position as the privileged voice of the unconscious" (LaGuardia 124-5). Essentially, LaGuardia proposes that many of the protagonists in Bécquer's legends tend to procure pleasure and even sexual gratification from their own pain or humiliation. My study disagrees, based on textual evidence, with his opinion that any protagonist in these legends delights in his or her own pain. Though LaGuardia's psychoanalytic argument is heavily based upon Freud's theories of unconscious desire, therefore sexualizing all of the actions and desires of the protagonists studied, he does recognize that "fulfillment of desire on a literal plane becomes elusive and finally impossible" (134). My study would concur with the conclusion that none of the protagonists find fulfillment to their desires. It is important to consider LaGuardia's work as the leading peer-reviewed discussion on desire in Bécquer, however, there is significant room left for analysis of a non-psychological nature.

Manuela Cubero-Sanz also follows the role of desire, but she tracks the evolution of female characters in Bécquer's legends in the article "La mujer en las leyendas de Becquer", beginning with the first legend to be published and ending with the last. She concludes that Bécquer created many different types of female characters in his works - the angelic, the diabolical, and the unattainable - but that beauty was the driving force behind desire. This discussion indirectly suggested that the uniting factor for desire is beauty or attractiveness itself. While Bécquer's texts seem to illustrate that the male characters will do the unthinkable as a result of the magnetic power of the ideal, this study does not give attention to the social implications of the protagonists' actions and the cataclysmic results, nor does it take into account the yearnings of the partnered female protagonists whose desires are just as critical as the desires of male protagonists.

While in Cubero-Sanz's discussion, the attraction of the female is similarly portrayed as the solitary hope for relief from the deep longings of the protagonists, another scholar saw a different function of the female, and therefore of desire. In "La Mujer y el Amor en Bécquer y en Baudelaire" by María del Rosario Delgado-Suárez, woman is identified in one of three roles: the temptress that brings man to perdition, the angelic being capable of self-sacrifice and offering man salvation, or the impossible woman of Bécquer's fantasy. This article focused more on love and women as they relate to eroticism and the five senses and less on the definition or implications of desire. In an indirect way, desire is addressed in this article, but it is only

taken as far as woman and the ability of love to satiate it. The concept of love, however, is not directly equated with that of desire, though they might be related, and therefore cannot provide a foundation for this study. Delgado-Suárez's purpose was to compare the female characters of Bécquer to those of Baudelaire, and therefore focused more on those textual similarities between the two authors.

Yet another critic poses the following very pertinent question when considering the insatiable longing and desire of Bécquer's protagonists: "¿Es un sentimiento que brota del fondo del alma de esta 'ansia perpetua de algo mejor,' o es sólo una técnica de que se sirve el autor para expresar lo inefable de la vida?" (Woolsey 277). In other words, Woolsey wonders if the longing of these protagonists serves to attest to a perpetual desire in the soul for something more, or if Bécquer is simply attempting to express the inexpressable aspects of life. Wallace Woolsey, in this article entitled, "La mujer inalcanzable como tema en ciertas leyendas de Bécquer," again turns to the female figure as the main cause of suffering for the protagonists of Bécquer, rather than analyzing the function of desire in these legends. Woolsey does, however, offer a few more suggestions as to why the female characters are portrayed in this way. Bécquer's own bitter and painful childhood is mentioned briefly as possibly playing a role in the development of his legends (281), however, biographical information of the author is not conclusive enough in and of itself to answer why protagonists within their literature behave a certain way and experience certain outcomes, nor does

this argument provide an explanation for the vengeful desire of female protagonists in the legends. Another suggestion presented in the article is the artist's desire to express the ephemeral nature of life (ibid). The critic suggests that desire is fueled by the motive of impossible love, "¿Cómo se puede calcular la belleza que se encuentre en la prosa y el la poesía de Bécquer que no existiera sin el motivo del amor imposible, de la mujer que siempre se nos escapa?" (ibid). In posing these questions and drawing near to these themes, though still fixating on the object of desire and not the function of desire itself, Woolsey's article is the most relevant to my study, but also proves that prior arguments about desire are incomplete.

Woman, though an archetypal symbol for desire in man, is not actually the end in and of herself in Bécquer's works, though she is treated like it in many scholarly arguments. Bécquer often uses a woman as the protagonist's goal, the object of desire, but in fact, the protagonist is in search of something that cannot be obtained: not just the ideal woman, but to get one's own way, no matter what the cost. Woman is a means to an end, but that end is actually the arrival at a complete and eternal state of fulfillment of ego, which clearly never happens in Bécquer's legends because the underworld or the spiritual world "fights back". By moving the focus away from woman as the goal of these protagonists' conquests, we can take a closer look at the concept and function of desire and the human propensity to seek satisfaction of "ego" and personal desire over all else.

The most significant model of desire utilized in this study is one explained in René Girard's book, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. Girard's first chapter is called "'Triangular' Desire". This chapter on triangular desire essentially names *imitation* as the main motivation behind any object of desire found in certain protagonists. Though triangular desire is not seen in most novels, according to Girard, it does occur when the subject pursues objects of desire established for him by an esteemed third party (Girard 2). This third party is referred to as the *mediator* of desire. The example of Don Quixote is given. According to Girard, Don Quixote surrendered to the fictional Amadís of Gaul, his mediator, whom he sees as the epitome of chivalry and knighthood. Don Quixote, then, no longer chooses his own objects of desire, but they are dictated for him by Amadís (1). To Don Quixote, chivalry is the imitation of Amadís, so Don Quixote must first perceive via Amadís that an object is worthy of pursuit before he, too, wants it (that object might change over the course of the novel) (2). Instead of drawing a horizontal line from Don Quixote, the subject, to the thing he desires, the object, the line must travel upward and pass through Amadís, the mediator, to determine what exactly the object of desire is. The imaginary line then travels back downward toward the intended object, thus completing the image of the triangle.

This exact triangular model of desire is not seen in the legends of Bécquer, but it deserves mention because something similar happens, including the metaphorical formation of a triangle in the course that the

protagonists take to pursue their desires. At first glance, Bécquer's protagonists might *seem* to be operating in line with Girard's model, but upon closer examination, it is evident that the triangular route toward an object of desire operates differently in these legends. In the case of Bécquer's legends, the subjects all fixate upon a basic (primary) and egotistical desire, but adopt an instrumental (secondary) desire that each believe will bring them closer to the first desire. The course of action, seeking the primary, then secondary desire, does form a triangle, but it will be explained in further detail in the next chapter how this model is different than the model of triangular desire that Girard outlines.

Christopher Heathwood's dissertation, *Desire-Satisfaction Theories of Welfare*, provided a clear and useful explanation of the "actualist desire satisfaction theory" (as opposed to the "idealist desire satisfaction theory") and how it relates to the concept of welfare, which was also helpful in understanding the narrative consequences for egotism. His purpose was to show how defective desires exist, or rather, how we desire things that are bad for us, but the actualist desire satisfaction theory can accommodate for this fact (Heathwood 15). Heathwood's second chapter on defective desires is particularly pertinent to the present study, as the protagonists of Bécquer's legends all desire things that, though maybe not intrinsically bad for them, end up bad for them because they prevent satisfaction or bring about destruction, death, or insanity, for example. Heathwood gives a definition to terms that the protagonists in legends of Bécquer suffer from, such as *desire*

*frustrations*. These are “states of affairs in which a subject desires that some proposition be true but the proposition is not true” (18). Bécquer’s protagonists not only desire that certain propositions be true, but they also erroneously *believe* they are true, which is the very myth that the protagonists create to keep their hopes alive and fuel their self-centered pursuits. Heathwood also defines *all-things-considered defective desires*, which correlates to the idea of certain objects of desire being not intrinsically bad, but leading to bad things or preventing good things (21). For example, longing for companionship is not inherently bad for a person, however, setting one’s desire for companionship with a spirit of evil (as in several of Bécquer’s legends) will ultimately bring about bad things for the subject. Whether the “excuse” is that the desire is ill-informed, irrational, artificially-aroused, etc. in nature, the outcome is the same: the desire is *all-things-considered* bad for the subject (22). This idea fits well with the pattern seen in the function of desire in the legends analyzed. The terminology provided by Heathwood provided insights for analysis of the relationships and consequences.

Though David Hume wrote during the 18th century, he is still considered to be “the most important philosopher ever to write in English,” and many of his work on the passions are useful today (Morris, “David Hume”). His philosophies, specifically in “A Dissertation of the Passions” could be used to show how these protagonists truly hoped to achieve the objects of their desire, not just pursue them indefinitely. First, Hume defines

good and evil objects by their affect upon our senses: “Some objects produce immediately an agreeable sensation, by the original structure of our organs, and are thence denominated GOOD; as others, from their immediate disagreeable sensation, acquire the appellation of EVIL” (Hume, 4: 189).

Building upon that, he goes on to indicate the subsequent emotions that rise from sensations of good and evil: “When either good or evil is uncertain, it gives rise to FEAR or HOPE, according to the degree of uncertainty on one side or the other. DESIRE arises from good considered simply; and AVERSION, from evil” (190). These definitions are imperative to understanding the protagonists’ motivations correctly. In Bécquer’s legends “good” is transformed to “evil”, likewise a false sense of self-importance and willfulness turns an illusory hope to evil consequences.

From Hume’s definitions, it is clear that Bécquer’s protagonists are pursuing something they deem “good” – objects they believe will produce an agreeable sensation, not painful or disagreeable. No protagonist shows signs of masochistic behavior, as suggested by LaGuardia; if anything, they are exhibiting hedonistic behavior in pursuing what they think will bring about their own happiness and pleasure, even at all costs. The conclusion that Bécquer’s protagonists are seeking satisfaction, not just desire itself, comes from the reverse application of Hume’s following observation:

An evil, considered as barely *possible*, sometimes produces fear; especially if the evil be very great. A man cannot think on excessive pain and torture without trembling, if he runs the



least risk of suffering them. The smallness of the probability is compensated by the greatness of the evil. But even *impossible* evils cause fear. (193)

As Hume shows, the possibility of evil produces fear, while the possibility of good produces hope. If the above logic is certain, the opposite should also be true. Hume argues that an evil, especially a very great and threatening evil, even if it is unlikely or impossible, can produce fear. Therefore, it must be said that a good thing (defined as producing agreeable sensations), especially a very good and wonderful thing, even if it is unlikely or impossible, can produce hope. This is how desire functions in the legends of Bécquer. The protagonists have hope in addition to desire.

Essentially, while it might seem possible that the protagonists of the ten legends analyzed in the next chapter rejected satisfaction because they fixated upon objects unattainable and unrealistic, it is more logical and probable that they embraced and hoped for hedonistic satisfaction. In fact, the satisfaction they hoped to gain from possessing these objects was compounded exponentially by the impossible, evasive, and ethereal nature of the objects. According to Hume, these impossible objects might be even more worth chasing because they are so far superior to other good things available. Definitions provided by Hume, and more recently Heathwood, show how the protagonists truly believe they can achieve their impossible dreams, and attempt to do so, even when society members have warned them against it. This also proves the only other study on desire and Bécquer,

that of LaGuardia, to be wrong in its assumption that the protagonists extracted pleasure from their own humiliation. My analysis will show the protagonists' arrogant attempt to pursue and control the objects of their desire at all costs and against the advice of onlookers will merit the punishment and consequences dealt out by the supernatural forces that are truly in control.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Desire and the Path toward Perdition

The course of action in the majority of the legends of Bécquer is fueled by a desire for an impossible object. This desire dictates the protagonists' decisions and actions, providing the structure for the entire storyline. The pattern that recurs in Bécquer's legends is a three-stage progression of events that starts with kindled hopes for the object desired and ends with the tragic dashing of those hopes. In the first step, the protagonist's desire for a certain object, usually a person, is made known to the reader, but he or she discovers barriers preventing the conquest of that desired object. Secondly, the protagonist discovers what he or she believes to be the way to satisfy the craving and improve the chances for getting their way by participating in a temporary transfer of his or her will to an inanimate object that represents the initial object. The new quest at hand offers the protagonist the hope of realizing his or her dreams, and the transfer serves as an illusory host. The final stage of the three is marked by tragedy when the pursuit of the representational object, under the dillusional impression that it is going to help obtain the original object, fails. The result of the kindled desire, the transferred desire, and the pursuit of the transferred desire is consistently an arrival at punishment and loss.

The function of desire can be understood best with an illustration from two specific legends of Bécquer, *El Monte de las Ánimas* and *La ajorca de oro*. These two legends parallel one another considerably in regard to plot, but as analysis will show, the model can be applied systematically to Bécquer's other legends as well. The goal is to prove the pattern of the function of desire and its outcome in the other legends by Bécquer.

The plot of both legends begins with the male protagonist desiring the affection of a woman. Each protagonist tries to manipulate her into acting in a way that communicates reciprocated romantic interest. The female protagonists, on the other hand, see through these unwelcome schemes and concoct their own manipulative plans to bring about revenge on these men for their desires. Each protagonist, male and female, have as an aim the goal of personal pleasure at the expense of the other.

Another commonality between these two legends is that the scheming female protagonist is the one to invent the false quest, suggesting the transfer of desire, which is thought by the male protagonist to be the gateway to gaining her affections and, ultimately, his reward. In reality, however, it is a game or trap. Both women devise cunning plans to send their suitors off on dangerous quests to bring back objects of beauty and adornment: a hair ribbon from a haunted mount in *El Monte de las Ánimas* and a golden bracelet from a haunted cathedral in *La ajorca de oro*. The object represents the woman's own vanity and her desire to see the man squirm in fear and determination. They turn the manipulation around on the men who, in

contrast to the women, *cannot* see through their evil schemes as they are blinded by their desire for the women's affection. The women have no intention of bestowing their affection in exchange for the retrieval of these objects, but the men, eager to impress them, hurry off, unknowingly to their doom. The female protagonists do not emerge unscathed. They are self-made victims of their own deception as the legendary nature of Bécquer's haunting fictional environment spoils their fun with a foul turn of events.

### **El Monte de las Ánimas**

First, in *El Monte de las Ánimas*, Alonso yearns for the affections of his cousin Beatriz, but she is not interested in him romantically. Beatriz has been passive up until this point, so Alonso designs a situation that will obligate her to be more active in either her acceptance or refusal of him. He artfully offers her a token to remember him by, saying that he remembers this day when the two were at the temple worshipping, and Beatriz noticed the pin that adorned his hat. To stir up some sort of sentiment on Beatriz' side, Alonso offers that jeweled pin to her, saying it would look stunning, adorning a veil over her dark hair:

¿Te acuerdas cuando fuimos al templo a dar gracias a Dios por haberte devuelto la salud que vinistes a buscar a esa tierra? El joyel que sujetaba la pluma de mi gorra cautivó tu atención. ¡Qué hermoso estaría sujetando un velo sobre tu oscura cabellera! Ya ha prendido el de una deposada, mi padre se lo

regaló a la que me dio el ser, y ella lo llevó al altar. . . ¿Lo quieres? (131)

He tempts her natural inclination toward vanity by flattering her and complimenting how she would look with the adornment. The tease is pertinent because his reference to the pin being given by his father to his mother who wore it on their wedding day indicates that this gesture is a hint at an engagement between Alonso and Beatriz. Her first response to Alonso's scheme to get her to accept his unwelcome advances is a cold and aloof rejection. She questions the propriety of receiving his token and recognizes his game because, where she comes from, that would indicate that she is accepting his proposal of marriage. She betrays both the fact that she is not interested in him romantically and that she feels victimized by his assertiveness when she verbalizes those reservations based on cultural propriety.

-No sé en el tuyo –contestó la hermosa-; pero en mi país una prenda recibida compromete una voluntad. Solo en un día de ceremonia debe aceptarse un presente de manos de un deudo. . ., que aún puede ir a Roma sin volver con las manos vacías.

El acento helado con que Beatriz pronunció estas palabras turbó un momento al joven . . . (ibid)

Alonso is momentarily perturbed by her cold response, but he does not give up. He desires this alliance with her so greatly that he explains that today is a

day of celebration in which it is normal to give and receive gifts. Taking his gift, he assures her, would not bind her to any understanding of marriage or be perceived as improper. “-Lo sé, prima; pero hoy se celebran todos los santos, y el tuyo entre todos; hoy es día de ceremonias y presentes. ¿Quieres aceptar el mío?- Beatriz se mordió ligeramente los labios y extendió la mano para tomar la joya, sin añadir una palabra” (ibid). In saying these words, his last attempt to have his overtures received positively, he releases her from social obligation, saying that accepting his jeweled pin would not indicate a betrothal. The significance of these words changes the course of action for the rest of the legend because, now that Beatriz is free from any social obligation, she can decide whether she wants to continue the interaction amiably or maliciously. She chooses the latter.

Beginning with his own offer, Alonso then pushes for an exchange of tokens to remember one another by because he believes a personal effect from Beatriz would bring him a step closer to her in sentiment and in proximity. As it would be inappropriate for two members of the opposite sex to touch outside of marriage, an object of hers that had once adorned her clothing or hair, for example, and an object of his that had once touched his hat, represent a physical touch or exchange that was not available to them otherwise. The exchange of physical adornments represents Alonso’s hope for intimacy with Beatriz because these tokens not only possess monetary worth and beauty, but an element of touch and the connotation of physically possessing part of the other person.

Beatriz hesitantly accepts the token from his hand, but Alonso is not satisfied with a one-way transaction. Basking in his small victory, he takes a fateful risk in furthering the deal: he asks for a token back from her. “-Y antes que concluya el día de Todos los Santos, en que así como el tuyo se celebra el mío, y puedes, sin atar tu voluntad, dejarme un recuerdo, ¿no lo harás? – dijo él, clavando una mirada en la de su prima” (131-2). The token he requests from her takes his manipulation a step further, and she knows exactly what he is doing.

His hopeful glance is met by her inwardly conniving one, and an idea is born in Beatriz’ mind that ultimately leads to the perdition of both protagonists. The narrator articulates that the look on her face illuminates like lightning from the diabolical plan forming in her mind. Her glance “brilló como un relámpago, iluminada por un pensamiento diabólico” (132). In freeing Beatriz from any binding social obligations, then going so far as to ask that she actively return the sentiment, Alonso unknowingly creates a protective incubator for Beatriz’ malicious nature to sprout up, and her diabolical plan to grow and take shape. A sudden shift in power from wishful thinker to depraved avenger takes place because Beatriz has been released from social bindings of decorum by Alonso himself. The flash of lightning across her eyes indicates how the target becomes the hunter; Beatriz refuses to be Alonso’s prey, so turns the game around on him. She concocts an avenue for vengeance, desiring to punish Alonso for his unwelcome desire for her.



Beatriz' sinister idea is to give the blue band she "lost along the way" to Alonso. She claims to have dropped it when crossing the Monte de las Ánimas, a fearsome place according to Alonso since it is where each year, on All Saint's Day, the ghosts of troubled souls come out and haunt the surrounding area at night. Beatriz learned of this legend from Alonso's narration of it earlier in the day, and she also learned that the possibility of sending him out on such a night would challenge his valor by exposing his cowardice. Using this knowledge as a part of her plan to punish and expose him, she responds to his overture, "¿Por qué no? - . . . Después con una infantil expresión de sentimiento, añadió -: ¿Te acuerdas de la banda azul que llevé hoy a la cacería, y por no sé qué emblema de su color me dijiste que era la divisa de tu alma?" (132). Her expression turns infantile and playful as she guilefully leads him to believe that she had intended to give him the ribbon that she was wearing the other day. He declares that, yes, he remembers the adornment, unaware of her mocking intentions.

She goes on to say, "¡Pues. . . se ha perdido! Se ha perdido, y pensaba dejártela como un recuerdo" (ibid). It is not revealed whether Beatriz indeed lost her blue band when crossing the Monte de Ánimas or not, but it is clear by the change in her tone, from skeptical of Alonso's proposition to suddenly playing along with feigned innocence, that she desires to use Alonso's wrapped attention for her own revenge. By telling him that she had intended to give him this blue ribbon that she was wearing and lost on the way, she baits him for her own amusement. Her intention is to be as impossible as he

is and see if Alonso is willing to serve her even when it involves launching himself into the entrails of the very ghost story he fears.

Beatriz is not about to reciprocate her cousin's interest, but thinks she might have a chance at revenge, punishing his desire for her, by his eagerness to win her over. Alonso eagerly takes the bait, asking her in fear and hope where it got lost, so that he might go fetch it. When she responds that it was lost on the Monte de las Ánimas, he is physically taken over with fear, turning pale and falling into his chair in shock:

-¡Se ha perdido! ¿Y dónde? – preguntó Alonso,  
incorporándose de su asiento y con una indescriptible  
expresión de temor y esperanza.

-No sé. . . En el monte, acaso.

-¡En el Monte de las Ánimas! – murmuró, palideciendo y  
dejándose caer sobre el sitial-. ¡En el Monte de las Ánimas!

(ibid)

Alonso's first reaction is fear and hope, *una indescriptible expresión de temor y esperanza*, when he hears that the blue band has been lost. He quickly falls into her trap, believing she actually wanted to give him a token of her reciprocated affection.

His fear at this point is a fear of loss. He regrets the loss of the ribbon for Beatriz' sake because he desires her and she feigns distress over having misplaced her possession. He also fears his own loss of the desired target, that he may never recover the token she promises him, the very object

intended to be proof of reciprocated affection. His ability for self-deception, however, is stronger than his fear of the underworld. He sets himself on the path for punishment and destruction as he plans for the recovery and safe return of the hair adornment. His return from an expedition to recover the object, in his mind, signifies a return of affection from Beatriz and the satisfaction of his craving. Filled with this hope, he must address a second, more carnal fear: that of venturing out into haunted lands to retrieve the object that now carries all of his transferred hope and emotional fervor.

The enamored protagonist boasts a desire that is very straightforward: he desires Beatriz's reciprocated affection. The desires of Beatriz are much more complicated and cloaked. When she makes her veiled desire known to him, her desire for him to uncover the missing hairband, her desire becomes his. He goes pale at the thought of venturing out on the night of the dead, but his desire transfers to the blue band, an inanimate object that represents the favor and affection of Beatriz. For that reason, he pursues it at all costs, with the same zeal he was pursuing Beatriz.

This transfer of desire to the hair ribbon makes Alonso vulnerable because with it comes the creation of a new and fictional reality in which he is now operating. The true reality is that Beatriz has no interest in Alonso and has created a fool's errand for him just for her own amusement. The second and fictitious reality, however, is that Alonso believes his successful completion of the mission will earn him the favor of Beatriz. He is deceived and therefore not operating in Beatriz' reality: one bent on denying him her

affection. He embraces his delusional reality because it provides him with what he wants to be promised: hope for satisfaction of his desire.

Though a mythical reality, this new reality into which Alonso has entered is a powerful one that propels him forward blindly in his mission and ultimately to death. Beatriz is responsible for creating it, but Alonso is responsible for embracing it and not seeing through her deception. With his new desire fixed upon the ribbon, he becomes prisoner to the full range of what it symbolizes: not only beauty, value, touch, hope, but also loss, violence, pain, disillusionment, and ultimately death.

His mission to retrieve the ribbon is mysteriously realized, but not by Alonso. The narrator informs the reader that Alonso is attacked and killed by wolves the night of his quest. "Sus servidores llegaron, despavoridos, a noticiarle [a Beatriz] la muerte del primogénito de Alcudiel, que a la mañana había aparecido devorado por los lobos entre las malezas del Monte de las Ánimas" (134). The delusion of Alonso's second reality leads him to take the risk of tempting fate. Violence and death overtake him in a tragic end of loss and pain that decimate his naïve hopes. But the consequence for arrogantly pushing against the predetermined laws of society and nature do not stop at Alonso.

The ribbon, now the symbol of the force that brought about destruction, makes its way into Beatriz' chamber, torn apart and bloodied. Upon contemplating how it arrived there without Alonso's return, Beatriz dies a violent and gruesome death of terror from the spectacle. The very

representation of the protagonist's desire, namely, the blue band, converts into the means for castigation and the demise of both Alonso and Beatriz.

At first glance, the three characters at hand, Alonso, Beatriz, and the blue band, masquerade as a trio that might seem like candidates for the "triangle" model of desire, put forth by René Girard. Girard explains the phenomenon using Cervantes' famous character, Don Quixote, to illustrate. He suggests that Don Quixote surrendered to Amadís who, in Don Quixote's estimation, was the epitome of chivalry and what it meant to be a knight. Don Quixote no longer chooses the objects of his own desire, but rather Amadís dictates them by the simple fact that Don Quixote promptly imitates each one (Girard 1). The term *mediator of desire* refers to the esteemed third party (Amadís) who suggests that the disciple or subject (Quixote) pursue objects predetermined for him by the mediator (2). The triangle is formed when the "subject", Quixote, horizontally pursues the "object", chivalry or knighthood (or any number of adventures, pursuits, and objects over the progression of a novel), while the "mediator" hovers overhead, dictating the "object" and influencing the "subject". This triangle allows for any amount of proximity or contact between the subject and mediator (4). The two might be complete strangers, having never met in the physical world (such as the relationship between celebrity and fan, or protagonist in a fiction novel and its reader), or they may have regular contact in the physical world (such as between suitor and damsel, or employer and employee). Otherwise stated, the person that acts as mediator could be real or imagined, but the mediation is still real (4).

Taking into account this triangular model, Beatriz might be seen as the mediator esteemed by the subject, Alonso, who changes his trajectory of desire horizontally toward the blue band that she desires to repossess so she can grant it to him as a token, as she leads him to believe. The shape of the triangle forms quite unmistakably as Alonso embarks on a mission to recover the blue band, with Beatriz metaphorically floating overhead pointing her finger at the blue band while emanating her influential power in Alonso's direction. Upon closer inspection, however, Alonso's desire is simpler than that.

The difference between the triangular model and what is seen here is that, here, Alonso does not begin to desire the blue band instead of Beatriz. His concentration temporarily shifts toward the blue band that Beatriz requests, but his longing is for her all along. When he envisions returning with the blue band, he foolishly expects his prize will not be the hair ornament, but rather Beatriz's approval or even affection. The blue band is not truly Alonso's desire as mediated by Beatriz; Beatriz remains his desire, but the band becomes a necessary detour in order to gain proximity to her. The relationship is more of a unilateral line than a triangle. As Girard admits, "In most works of fiction, the characters have desires which are simpler than don Quixote's. There is no mediator, there is only the subject and the object . . . desire is always spontaneous. It can always be portrayed by a simple straight line which joins subject and object" (2). Girard hints that the mimesis of desire in literature is usually simpler even than the triangle model,

including that of Alonso in *El Monte de las Ánimas*. Not every desire in this scenario is that straightforward, however.

Now placing Beatriz as the subject to analyze her desires, textual evidence has shown that she does not long for Alonso in the same way that he does her. Does that mean that desire on her part is nonexistent, and therefore even simpler and more nondimensional than Alonso's? This is hardly the case. A brief moment exists in the text where Beatriz shifts from being the victim of untoward advances from her cousin to being the dictator and oppressor. The diabolical look that flickers across her eyes indicates a much more complex desire that forms in the face of the situation in which she finds herself. Up until that point, at the most, she desired independence from Alonso, to simply keep him at arm's length as a cousin and riding companion, but nothing more. She desires to challenge his cowardice and noble upbringing, and in this moment of malicious thinking, her actions turn from self-protection to the infliction of discomfort or possibly even pain upon her counterpart. She desires mockery and deception that lead her cousin to loss of self, loss of soul, and a violent death. Beatriz plays the role of the sadist.

Stepping across the line from self-protection to self-gain, she moves in the direction of obligating Alonso to a task she knows he will inevitably embrace with fear and trembling. Girard describes sadistic behavior when he states, "Tired of playing the part of the martyr, the desiring subject chooses to become the tormentor" (184). She indeed becomes the tormentor when she

sends him out into the woods, knowing very well that it threatens both physical danger (a wolf-infested forest at night) and spiritual danger, whether real or imagined, on the night of the dead souls.

Now that the specific desires of the protagonists in *El Monte de las Ánimas* have been examined more closely, it will be helpful to take a step back in order to see the three stages of desire and their functions more clearly. The pattern seen in the majority of Bécquer's legends lies in the course of action taken by Alonso. First, the object of his desire becomes manifest: that of possessing Beatriz' affection. Instead of a mutual attraction or magnetism, there exists resistance on her side, making her an impossible object for him. The second stage is seen when Alonso transfers his desire temporarily to the blue ribbon that he believes will win Beatriz' affections, creating a foolish and false reality in which he operates and from which he never escapes. Nature has dictated that this union cannot happen and provides palpable resistance, but Alonso and Beatriz each try to seize control of the situation and make it happen according to their wills. The force of nature vanquishes this naive attempt to win in the end; Alonso's false reality leads him to foolishly enter the dangerous forest, and he is devoured by wolves. The result of his desire for the impossible is violent loss and ruin. Beatriz' desire to see Alonso squirm, however, does not go unpunished.

Beatriz, like Alonso, is a victim of temptation when she acts maliciously on her desires. Consequently, she spends a frightful and sleepless night hearing uncanny sounds and feeling a haunting presence. "Ya no era



una ilusión: las colgaduras de brocado de la puerta habían rozado al separarse, y unas pisadas lentas sonaban sobre la alfombra . . . y a su compás se oía crujir una cosa como madera o hueso” (134). After a night of insomnia and terror, the dawn breaks and Beatriz rises from her bed. Her face turns deathly pale as she beholds a foreign object in her room: the torn and bloodied ribbon that Alonso had gone to seek. When her servants enter to tell Beatriz of Alonso’s unfortunate death, they find Beatriz, her face contorted, dead from horror. Unique to this legend, both protagonists die as a direct result of willfully pushing the boundaries predetermined by the natural and spiritual world that govern them.

### **La ajorca de oro**

The stage is set for another transfer of desire in *La ajorca de oro* when the young man, Pedro Alfonso de Orellana, is passionately attracted to a dangerously alluring woman, María Antúnez. The narrator suggests that her unmatched beauty is given from the devil as a way to make her his instrument on earth. “Hermosura diabólica, que tal vez presta el demonio a algunos seres para hacerlos sus instrumentos en la tierra” (123). With this description, the narrator sets the stage for the forces of evil and the underworld to work through the exaggerated beauty. María’s manipulative character is indeed made known when the protagonist, Pedro, finds her weeping by the river one day. After much coaxing, María finally confesses that it will make Pedro laugh, but the reason why she is sad is because she

was at Mass the other day and noticed the golden bracelet that the image of the Virgen was wearing on her arm, which she now wants for herself:

Es una locura y te hará reír, pero no importa; te lo diré, puesto que lo deseas. Ayer estuve en el templo . . . levanté la cabeza y mi vista se dirigió al altar. No sé por qué mis ojos se fijaron . . . [en] un objeto que, sin que pudiese explicármelo, llamaba sobre sí toda la atención. . . No te rías. . . Aquel objeto era la ajorca de oro que tiene la madre de Dios en uno de los brazos en que descansa su divino Hijo. (124)

The desire for an object just beyond human reach is a classic characteristic of Bécquer's legends. María elaborates for quite some time, revealing to the reader both her obsession with the golden bracelet and her clandestine attempt to coerce Pedro into stealing it for her. The significance of the bracelet is that it was a gift to the Virgin Mary by a *religioso* of the parish to honor her as one who gave up her own will in order to serve others. It signifies a chaste and pure love, but the protagonist María seeks to adulter it with a selfish attempt to steal it while making a mockery of Pedro's love. She is blind to the sacred, celestial power that is represented by the golden ornament.

Pedro, similarly, obsesses over María with a blind desire of his own that knows no limits, which is an important detail that sets him up to play the fool, unable to distinguish between her favor and her trickery. "Él la amaba; la amaba con ese amor que no conoce freno ni límites" (123). His desire for

María causes him to prod her over and over to open up to him emotionally, making herself vulnerable, and revealing the cause of her anguish. He believes he is cultivating intimacy between them, but this was her plan all along: to play the tormented soul so he would come to her rescue. And he plays her game just like she intends. She sees through his novice attempt to further their attachment to one another and takes advantage of his blind desire for her. He, on the other hand, does not see through her ruse, but takes her misery at face value, and seizes the opportunity to be a hero and win her over, not acknowledging that this diabolical woman cannot be possessed, nor should she be.

Pedro asks her where the object she laments can be found, and is horrified to find out that it is on the wrist of La Virgen del Sagrario in the cathedral of Toledo. His shock and horror is indubitable. “¡La del Sagrario! – repitió el joven con un acento de terror-. ¡La del Sagrario de la catedral!. . . Y en sus facciones se retrató un instante el estado de su alma, espantada de una idea” (125). He mumbles that it would be better to take the jeweled token from the archbishop’s miter, the king’s crown, or out of the claws of the devil himself (ibid). He trembles at the thought of stealing from the revered patron saint of Toledo, his birth city! This would be a spiritual offense of unspeakable magnitude. Nonetheless, he vows to go get the bracelet, even if it costs him his life or salvation when he says, “Yo se la arrancarí para ti, aunque me costase la vida o la condenación” (ibid). He recognizes that the consequences could be eternally damning, but he is controlled by his desire

for María like a marionette is controlled by the puppetmaster. His desire obligates him to make foolish decisions in the face of losing his María's favor, favor he does not realize is only an illusion.

Here, the transfer of desire is seen as Pedro turns his attention to the golden bracelet. Within this inanimate object converge the two desires of the protagonists: María's desire to possess the bracelet, and Pedro's desire to possess the bracelet that will earn him María. When Pedro transfers his desire to the bracelet, the object doubles its power, power that is now capable of destroying anyone who attempts to dominate it. Pedro embarks on that very mission, ordained by María: an attempt to dominate what cannot be had. Pedro cannot conquer the bracelet because it is the representation of María, who also cannot be possessed by him. He is a fool to think that her love can be earned through a depraved mission. Love can only be given from free will, which she is not choosing to bestow.

The moment Pedro transfers his desire to the bracelet, another thing happens that was similarly seen in *El Monte de las Ánimas*. Pedro unknowingly steps into a false reality woven together by María herself, a pretense that promises him her affection if he only carries out her devilish plan. Now operating in this delusional reality, Pedro faces his fears and enters the dreaded cathedral, home to the Virgin who wears the desired bracelet. Terrified by the sepulchers all around him as he slinks through the nave of the cathedral, he attempts to deny his imagination and stay focused on the golden prize. "Extendió la mano con un movimiento convulsivo y le

arrancó la ajorca; la ajorca de oro . . . cuyo valor equivalía a una fortuna” (127). After snatching the valuable object from the Virgin on the altar with trembling hands, all that remains is to flee. He squeezes his eyes shut to avoid seeing the shadows, demons, and ghosts that he is sure are coming alive around him. Finally, he opens his eyes and lets out a scream: “La catedral estaba llena de estatuas; estatuas que, vestidas con luengos y no vistos ropajes, habían descendido de sus huecos y ocupaban todo el ámbito de la iglesia y le miraban con sus ojos sin pupila . . . se rodeaban y confundían en las naves y en el altar” (ibid). The statues of the church had descended from their pedestals and occupied the area around him in the heart of the church, observing him with their vacant eyes. Pedro is found screaming out nonsense the next day by the church officials, and still clutching the piece of sacred jewelry. He had gone insane (128). When he followed the diabolical plan and gave up his soul for a human ornament of great monetary worth, his fate was a living hell.

The parallels in plot abound between *La ajorca de oro* and *El Monte de las Ánimas*. In both legends, the male protagonist desires the female protagonist’s reciprocated affection to such an extent that he foolishly commits to an errand that endangers him physically (“aunque me costase la vida . . .”) and spiritually (“o la condenación”) (ibid). Both María and Beatriz are guilty of leading the young men to perdition as they use temptation to lure in their victims. They do not care about the danger in which they are putting their male counterparts before sending them off. Rather, they desire

retribution for the men's attempts at manipulating their will for their own benefit.

In *La ajorca de oro*, it is not clear if María actually despises Pedro to the point that she designs this plan specifically to punish him for desiring her, such as is seen with Beatriz in *El Monte de las Ánimas*. But what is clear is that she accommodates her own vanity and covetous desire over Pedro's well-being. The narrator admits that it is not known what transpired between María and Pedro after he vowed to fetch the golden adornment for her (126). The reader, then, cannot be certain as to her motives as they relate to Pedro, because there is little evidence and dialogue that might betray them in this way. "¿Qué había pasado entre los amantes para que se arrestara, al fin, a poner por obra una idea que solo al concebirla se habían erizado sus cabellos de horror? Nunca pudo saberse. Pero él estaba allí, y estaba allí para llevar a cabo su criminal propósito" (ibid). Her motives are evil in nature, however, because, as established earlier, she herself is evil in nature, and she is coveting something from a patron saint. This reveals to the reader the state of her heart. Pedro makes it clear that he is terrified, which only reveals María's cold apathy toward her counterpart when she bids him go anyway. Physical and spiritual consequences could be involved, and she maliciously sends off her victim to bear them while she herself escapes unscathed.

Just as Beatriz concocts a diabolical plan to which she knows Alonso will foolishly consent, as his affection for her blinds him to her manipulation, María does the same thing, victimizing Pedro by way of his romantic interest

in her. The golden bracelet becomes the means for her own sinister lust. When Pedro accepts the opportunity to serve her desires, he becomes the instrument of evil. Her desire becomes his, and he fatefully catapults himself into the same false reality that Alonso does with Beatriz. Believing this action will earn the favor of his beloved or even that this quest could be possible without tragic consequences is where the transfer of desire happens. The distance between María's malicious reality and Pedro's delusional reality prepares the way for catastrophic events, and he is punished by the forces of the underworld for his attempt to conquer the unattainable and take part in an evil plot.

### **La corza blanca**

The transfer of desire in Bécquer's *La corza blanca* is easier to pinpoint as it follows the pattern in plot set forth by *El Monte de las Ánimas* and *La ajorca de oro*. In *La corza blanca*, the protagonist, Garcés, is the son of a servant to the family of the girl whom he loves, Constanza. In a social sense, this legend is different from the first two analyzed above. Garcés is not the social equal of Constanza, but rather her servant. Constanza is the daughter of the famous *caballero*, don Dionís, and her true identity is a mystery because her mother is unknown, but what is known is that Constanza's beauty is beyond comparison and her features are so pale that they have earned her the nickname Azucena, meaning white or Easter lily. Garcés, having served her from the time he was a boy, was accustomed to anticipating and meeting her desires, satisfying even the slightest craving of

hers: “desde muy niño habíase acostumbrado a prevenir el menor de sus deseos y adivinar y satisfacer el más leve de sus antojos” (220). Garcés’ predisposition is to serve Constanza, as he is a servant in her household, yet this tendency is compounded by his desire is to earn her affection. His unrealistic aspiration is an important key because this motive sets him up for disappointment and tragedy.

This relationship possesses a reverse magnetism, not only because the two involved belong to different social classes, but also because Garcés desires Constanza, but Constanza desires her own freedom. Garcés acts upon his longing for her, though an impossible object, which compels him to embrace a transfer of his own desire. He overhears a story told by Esteban, a local shepherd boy passing by, of Esteban’s encounter with a white doe of the forest that spoke in a human voice to her companions. “Me incorporé con prontitud para sorprender a la persona que las había pronunciado, una corza blanca como la nieve salió de entre las mismas matas en donde yo estaba ocultado . . . seguida de una tropa de corzas de su color natural” (ibid). The tale of a deer that is white like snow and speaks with a human voice sounds ludicrous. However, while the rest of the hunters who heard Esteban’s tale laugh uncontrollably and mock the shepherd’s story, Garcés thinks to himself that he would like to capture this animal, a symbol of freedom, to present to Constanza: “¡Oh, si yo pudiese coger viva una corza blanca para ofrecérsela a mi señora!” (222). This is the moment in which his desire shifts from desiring Constanza’s affections to desiring the elusive white doe, an imagined object



that Garcés believes will bring him closer to gaining her impossible affection. This legend has the same result as the others, where a transfer of desire to a white doe results in tragedy and affliction.

In his quest to win Constanza, Garcés seeks out the white doe as a representation of his beloved; he believes that conquering the white doe will win him her heart. After a long, sleepless hunt for the white doe that lasts into the early morning hours, Garcés, in a state of exhaustion and hope-filled delirium, finally catches some fleeting glimpses of his target. He raises his crossbow and shoots, intending to wound the prized creature, but a quick maneuver by the animal causes him to mortally wound her. Garcés is overtaken with anguish when he realizes that his prey has called out his name in protest. He rushes toward the voice and finds, instead of a white doe, Constanza, wounded by his own hand and dying in a pool of her own blood. “Sus cabellos se erizaron de horror . . . Constanza, herida por su mano, expiraba allí a su vista, revolcándose en su propia sangre, entre las agudas zarzas del monte” (229). Garcés had stretched his fictitious reality so far from the truth, by believing he could conquer Constanza and thinking that he could capture a mythical creature without killing it. The truth suddenly bursts through his delusional reality with a heavy and tragic blow. Though the violent end to his displaced desire does not bring death to Garcés himself, he causes the death of the one he loves, and he therefore reaps the emotional and spiritual consequences for his reckless attempt to make his own impossible desires reality.

### **La cueva de la mora**

Bécquer not only portrays the impossible desire of a protagonist attempting to cross the obstacle of social statuses, as in *La corza blanca*, but develops another legend whose protagonists attempt to traverse the barriers of opposing religions, in *La cueva de la mora*. In this legend, a well-known Christian knight falls wounded and is taken captive by the Arab inhabitants of a fortress in Fitero, battling for the Reconquest of Spain. He sees the beautiful daughter of the Moorish jailkeeper while prisoner there, and after his family members pay gold in order to get him out of jail, he cannot stop thinking about her. His impossible desire is for a Muslim girl whom he would never be allowed to marry because of her religion; Muslims were at this time being expelled from Spain for heresy and not converting to Christianity. “Se enamoró perdidamente de un objeto para él imposible” (204). Nonetheless, the *caballero* meditates on a way to break those barriers, and he concocts a dangerous plan that will get him closer to his desired object.

The *caballero's* transfer of desire is seen when he turns his attention to another battle against the same fortress that kept him captive. He gathers together soldiers and comrades who are led to believe he desires revenge, though they eventually learn about his love for the *mora* and try to advise him to forsake her, and together they begin a surprise attack against the Moorish stronghold. The *caballero* puts himself in danger with this temporary transfer of desire to see the fortress fall, not only because the

battle is perilous and could prove deadly, but also because he is pursuing an impossible desire: a relationship with a forbidden woman.

The quest indeed proves fatal. Though the surprise attack is successful, the *caballero* is mortally wounded and cries out to his lover for a drink of water (205). She borrows his helmet and takes a secret route to the river to fetch him some water. Along the way, she too is mortally wounded by her own people, because they heard the sound of movement and shot their arrows in her direction (*ibid*). She manages to return to her dying lover with water, but when he sees her bleeding and dying, he asks her permission to baptize her into the Christian religion using the water, so they might be together after death. She agrees, he baptizes her, and they both die there in the secret cave passageway. Though she loves him back, judging from her willingness to serve him and convert to Christianity for him, the *caballero's* displaced desire for a woman he cannot have ultimately brought about the physical death of both protagonists. The consequences for the rejection of his comrades' advice and the pursuit of this unattainable desire is death for him and his lover. In addition, their spirits continue to haunt the cave where they died. "[El caballero y su amada] aún vienen por las noches a vagar por estos contornos" (206). This indicates that they are also reaping the spiritual consequences for their prohibited actions: facing the restless middleground of purgatory, unable to enter heaven. Both physical and spiritual tragedy ensues as a direct result of wrong desires. Rebellious passions crop up in male and female, rich and poor, Spaniard and non-Spaniard alike, as seen in

the protagonists of *La cueva de la mora*, who then suffer the consequences as a result of going against societal norms and an attempt to satisfy their desires at all costs. From *La cueva de la mora* and the two protagonists of differing races and religions, Bécquer shows that the human temptation to get what it wants is not unique to one race, gender, or nationality, but is seen in all types of people.

### **El beso**

Similar to the previous four legends, *El beso* centers around a male protagonist who obsesses over a woman, but the difference is that this protagonist is not a Spaniard and the woman he fixates upon is no longer living. The protagonist of *El beso*, a French army captain, develops a desire for a strange, inanimate object: the marble statue of a noble Castilian woman kneeling next to the altar of the church in which the soldiers were lodging. The statue is next to her tomb, and a marble statue of a warrior, her husband, is at her side. The captain knows that his desire for her is an impossibility, that she is made of marble, and therefore not a living, breathing person: “-Lo era todo [sorda, ciega y muda] a la vez – exclamó al fin el capitán, despues de un momento de pausa-, porque era . . . de mármol” (235). He gushes about her every physical attribute and celestial quality as if she were able to be his lover, when he describes her as the quintessential woman of his youthful fantasies. “Sus armoniosas facciones, llenas de una suave y melancólica dulzura . . . su intensa palidez . . . me traían a la memoria esas mujeres que yo soñaba cuando casi era un niño. ¡Castas y celestes imágenes, quimérico objeto

del vago amor de la adolescencia!” (234). Had his admiration of the sculpture stayed at this distanced phase, he would have avoided the coming peril. He, like the other protagonists, however, insisted upon trying to further his own intimacy with the object of his affections.

His desire is for the idyllic woman that he believes to be the statue of the Castilian woman, the deceased doña Elvira. The transfer of desire happens when the captain tries to close the gap between him and the stone figure. Though he knows full well that she cannot be possessed as a human companion or lover, and he knows that danger lies between himself and her (he surmises that the menacing figure of the husband nearby could get jealous), he temporarily transfers his desire to an object that he equates with conquering her: a kiss. “Un beso. . . , solo un beso tuyo podrá calmar el ardor que me consume” (240). His comrades warn him to leave the dead in peace, but at this point he is unstoppable. The captain is being controlled so forcefully by his desire, that he cannot reason or act contrarily to his craving.

Without even hearing their words of warning, he leans in toward the statue, toward his own annihilation. Suddenly, he is sprawled out on the ground, with blood gushing out his eyes, mouth, and nose. In the moment where he had tried to touch his burning lips to those of doña Elvira, the rigid warrior lifted up his hand and demolished the captain with one swift blow of his stone gauntlet. “Los oficiales, mudos y espantados . . . habían visto al inmóvil guerrero levantar la mano y derribarle con una espantosa bofetada de su guantelete de piedra” (ibid). The captain had arrogantly tried to take

what could never be his for reasons even beyond the fact that she is a married woman. He fell for an illusion, an image of a woman who is no longer living, and attempted to interfere with the afterlife. The forces of this same unknown world put an irrevocable and terminal end to his travesty. Once again, an active attempt to overpower a resistive force ends tragically and brings the protagonist to his premature death.

### **Los ojos verdes**

Similar to *El beso*, *Los ojos verdes* reveals a protagonist's obsession with a woman beyond this world. The woman in *Los ojos verdes*, however, is not the representation of a woman who once lived on this earth, but a beautiful spirit who lives within the river, the wind, and the elements of nature itself. Another difference with this legend is that within the last of the three stages of desire, where the protagonist usually finds immediate perdition or loss, another fixation and transfer of desire occur in a sort of subplot, before the protagonist finally perishes in his punishment for pursuing an impossible conquest.

The first object that the young, noble protagonist, Fernando de Argensola, desires is implicit. He desires his own exaltation. Guided by his own arrogance, his quest in this legend is to be exalted as a recognized hunter. He has wounded a deer who escapes in the direction of a fountain inhabited by an evil spirit, *la fuente de los Álamos*. Because Fernando desires self-exaltation, the first transfer of desire is apparent when he focuses his obsessive attention to the wounded deer. The prized animal is the

representation of his own accomplishment and mastery of skill. If he loses the deer he maimed, he loses grasp on his original object of desire: to be recognized and esteemed for his achievement. He says he would rather lose the estate of his parents or his soul to the devil before he would let the deer escape from him (137). The third stage, the inevitable doom for seeking what he should not have, begins when he goes against the advice of his fellow hunters and riders and enters the enchanted area in search of his injured target.

The first fixation and transfer of desire happen in the first half of the legend, taking Fernando closer to his doom. Within the last stage, however, where the protagonist usually faces the consequences for his actions, another subplot occurs. In part II of *Los ojos verdes*, Fernando admits to Íñigo, the venerable master of the hunt, what actually happened to him on his quest for the deer, his object of transferred desire. He had jumped the enchanted river, *la fuente de los Álamos*, on his horse and seen at the bottom a curious thing: the eyes of a woman of an inexplicable green color. He states to Íñigo his new, admittedly impossible, desire without reservation: to find a woman with those eyes. “Yo creí ver una mirada que se clavó en la mía . . . que encendió en mi pecho un deseo absurdo, irrealizable: el de encontrar una persona con unos ojos como aquellos” (139). He recognizes his own desire as absurd and unrealizable, yet as soon as he sees what he thinks will bring him closer to that goal, he leaps for it, contrary to the warnings from others and his own better judgement.

One day, he sees the woman whom he believes is the physical representation of those eyes, and the second transfer of desire happens within the subplot. “Una tarde encontré . . . una mujer hermosa sobre toda ponderación . . . los ojos de aquella mujer eran los ojos que yo tenía clavados en la mente, unos ojos de un color imposible, unos ojos... -¡Verdes! –exclamó Íñigo” (ibid). Fernando instantly transfers his affection to this woman, the incarnation of the green eyes he had desired initially, when he saw her for the first time. Fernando knows perfectly well that she could be a demon when Íñigo explains that she is the spirit of evil that enchants the area and begs him to forsake his obsession with her. He goes on to explain, “el espíritu . . . demonio o mujer que habita en sus aguas tiene los ojos de ese color . . . Un día u otro os alcanzará su venganza y expiaréis, muriendo, el delito de haber encenagado sus ondas” (ibid). When Fernando goes forth to pursue his enchanting woman anyway, not heeding the warning, he surrenders his soul to the evil forces that will vanquish him in the end.

The third phase which draws both fixations (self-exaltation and green eyes) and both transfers of desire (the wounded deer and the spirit woman with green eyes) to a close is the punishment of Fernando for his arrogant pursuit of the impossible and his attempt to control malevolent spirits knowingly. During one of his frequent visits to see the woman of his dreams, he goes as far as to ask if she is a woman or demon, and she does not deny that she is a demon, but rather replies, “¿Y si lo fuese?” (140). His response to her evasion is, “Si lo fueses..., te amaría..., te amaría como te amo ahora,” and



he commits to loving her forever (141). At this point, he is not only trying to obtain an impossible woman, but he is willingly committing his soul to an evil spirit. When he leans in to kiss her, he feels a cold sensation on his arduous lips and loses his footing on the rock that looms over the enchanted waters of the *f fuente de los Álamos*. “Vaciló..., y perdió pie, y cayó al agua con un rumor sordo y lúgubre. Las aguas saltaron en chispas de luz y se cerraron sobre su cuerpo, y sus círculos de plata fueron ensanchándose, ensanchándose, hasta expirar en las orillas” (ibid). The enchanted waters swallow him up without trace, in a silent and funereal consequence for his arrogant actions and self-exaltation.

### **El gnomo**

The theme of an evil spirit inhabiting a spring of water is seen again in *El gnomo*, but in this legend the protagonists who are driven by their desires are females, showing that this endemic is not unique to just men.. Marta and Magdalena are sisters who were orphaned at a young age and had essentially suffered their whole lives from their greivous upbringing. They are opposite in nearly every way - Marta, the older sister, is more cold and callous, represented by her dark features, and Magdalena is sweet and kind, represented by her fair, angelic features and blue eyes – but they share one commonality: they had both secretly set their eyes on the same man (196). “Ambas guardaban el secreto de su amor, porque el hombre que lo había inspirado tal vez hubiera hecho mofa de un cariño que se podría interpretar como ambición absurda en unas muchachas plebeyas y miserables” (ibid).

Neither sister has spoken of her secret desire because such a man is clearly unattainable to commoners like them. Though a distance separates them from "*el objeto de su pasión*", they both cultivate a hope to one day possess him (ibid).

The dangerous transfer of desire comes after the sisters, along with a group of young ladies, listen to a word of warning from tío Gregorio, the old, wise storyteller of the town. He warns them not to linger too late at the fountain retrieving water because evil spirits, gnomes, inhabit the mountains, and unfortunate shepherds have gone missing or died as a result of unknowingly wandering into their enchanted areas. Tío Gregorio also mentions the precious stones, silver, and gold that the gnomes possess. This is what independently gives Marta and Magdalena the idea to go in after the treasure. The sisters are both acquainted with another tale from the ancient abandoned castle nearby, where a lowly shepherdess revealed the location of secret, underground passageways to the king so that he would be able to surprise attack the enemy and salvage the Crown. After his success, he offered the poor shepherdess up to half his kingdom in reward, and married her to one of his noble and brave comrades (ibid). Taking this into account, both sisters believe that they can achieve their original desire to marry the man they long for by discovering the passageways and wealth of the gnomes. The sisters depart on a mission leading them further from reality and deeper into a dangerous illusion that promises them wealth, status, and the opportunity to marry the man each desires.

Marta and Magdalena set out after dark and before long find themselves among strange, indistinguishable sounds, like those of dreams, and the whisperings of the water and the wind. The voices of the water and wind tempt them with sweet, alluring words, promising them many wonderful things. Marta confidently moves to accept the things offered to her, while Magdalena admits to her fear and wavering spirit (198). In the end, a gnome emerges, transparent and elusive. Marta goes forth, spellbound and irreversibly attracted, following the gnome deeper into the woods. Magdalena returned back to the town pale and in shock (201). Marta is never heard from again, but her water pitcher is found broken and abandoned the next day at the border of the *fuentes de la alameda*. Both sisters had the opportunity to resist the temptation and turn back, but only Magdalena chose this route. Marta suffered the implicit consequences of giving into temptation to the point of pursuing her desire at all costs, ignoring the advice from tío Gregorio. Textual evidence proves that dissatisfaction with the ordinary and feasible is a human condition that does not discriminate based on gender or social class, as in the case of Marta and Magdalena.

### **El rayo de luna**

*El rayo de luna* tells of another quest for the ideal mate, but the object of desire in this legend is neither living, nor dead, nor spirit; she is an illusion – an element of nature itself. Manrique, the protagonist of *El rayo de luna*, is a solitary dreamer whose noble status is not enough to assuage his desires. He makes a habit of spending long hours alone out in nature, daydreaming and

reveling in the solitude. The narrator reveals about Manrique that he had been born to dream about love, but not to feel it: “Había nacido para soñar el amor, no para sentirlo. Amaba a todas las mujeres un instante: a ésta porque era rubia, a aquella porque tenía los labios rojos, a la otra porque se cimbreaaba al andar como un junco” (155). His affections flit from one woman to another, as he admires each pleasing attribute that he sees, but he never achieves a relationship with one flesh and blood woman because he is too caught up with his world of daydreams. His desire is to experience the love of goddesses, women that might inhabit the unknown, the women of the stars, “¡qué mujeres tan hermosas serán las mujeres de esas regiones luminosas, y yo no podré verlas, y yo no podré amarlas!... ¿Cómo será su hermosura?... ¿Cómo será su amor?...” (ibid). He is engrossed in the notion of knowing the unknown.

Because of Manrique’s obsession with the impossible dream of an encounter with a celestial, ethereal woman, he is vulnerable to a transfer of desire, a path leading him further astray, that ends in tragedy. This opportunity presents itself one day as Manrique sees the white trimming of a woman’s dress float just out of reach. His transfer of desire, the detour that will lead to his devastation, is instantaneous: “-¡Una mujer desconocida!... ¡En este sitio!..., ¡a estas horas! Esa, esa es la mujer que yo busco -exclamó Manrique; y se lanzó en su seguimiento, rápido como una saeta” (156). He exclaims to himself that he cannot believe an unknown woman is walking

these parts – it must be the woman he is looking for, the woman of his dreams.

She evades him constantly, and he is never able to get more than a glimpse of her white garment. The same episode passes every two months, and his fervor and obsession grows. Finally, he sees her for a third time and comes to the halting realization that she was nothing more than a moon beam: “Era un rayo de luna, un rayo de luna que penetraba a intervalos por entre la verde bóveda de los árboles cuando el viento movía sus ramas” (161). For years, Manrique’s disillusionment and madness follows him. He is inconsolable by the outside world. He spurns looking for any other woman to make him happy or going to the war to reap glory and honor. His desire to possess the unknown world has brought about his own retribution. The forces outside Manrique, more powerful than the ones within him, turned on him, making the object of his affection the very cause of his own madness and demise.

### **El Miserere**

Though many of Bécquer’s legends concentrate on relationships between male and female protagonists, others present the intercourse between a protagonist and an aesthetic object. In the case of *El Miserere*, the protagonist is searching for perfect music, not the perfect woman. The protagonist is a musician from a faraway land who encounters a rural abbey on his pilgrimage. He explains that he has sinned against God and cannot find the proper words to ask God for forgiveness, so his mission is to travel until

he has heard all representations of the *Miserere*, a psalm of repentance of King David, with the goal of finding music so sublime that it merits accompanying the words of the psalm. His original desire is not a person or a tangible object, but rather to produce music of such ethereal quality that it would bring angels to tears and cause them to intercede on his behalf for the receiving of God's mercy:

Aún no lo he encontrado; pero si logro expresar lo que siento en mi corazón, lo que oigo confusamente en mi cabeza, estoy seguro de hacer un *Miserere* tal y tan maravilloso, que no hayan oído otro semejante los nacidos; tal y tan desgarrador, que al escuchar el primer acorde los arcángeles dirán conmigo, cubiertos los ojos de lágrimas y dirigiéndose al Señor: «¡Misericordia! », y el Señor la tendrá de su pobre criatura.

(174)

His desire is to transcribe and play a *Miserere* that would warrant reverence from God himself, thereby subverting the roles of Creator and creation. The musician believes he can create something so celestial that God himself will be awe-inspired and act in favor of the musician. He believes that God will absolve him of his sin if his performance is stellar enough. The musician's desire for God and angels to worship him for his creation is akin to the fallen angel Lucifer's desire to be worshipped above God.

After the monks learn of the musician's desire to behold and reproduce the music to a *Miserere* this transcendent in quality, they tell him

the legend of the *Miserere de la Montaña*. Immediately upon hearing this legend, that a *Miserere* allegedly exists, sung one night a year by the deceased souls of monks who suffered a tragic death and were unable to repent before being killed by a fire set to their monastery, a transfer of desire happens in the protagonist. The course of direction of his quest changes as his new desire is to “oír el grande, el verdadero *Miserere*, el *Miserere* de los que vuelven al mundo después de muertos y saben lo que es morir en el pecado,” to hear the one true *Miserere*, sung by those who return to this world after death and who know what it means to die in sin (176). The mystery and intrigue of what music sung by the tormented souls of the dead sounds like controls his actions and he sets out immediately, though the monks declare he is crazy for doing so. He believes that he will be capable of hearing the “otherworldly” and be able to reproduce it in the world of the living.

The result of setting out on this new quest, a dangerous and ill-advised quest with the goal of possessing something ineffable, is tragic indeed. Just as in the other legends, the force keeping the subject and his object apart is more powerful than the subject’s self-contained ability to grasp the object of his desire. The musician gets as far as beholding the haunting interpretation of the *Miserere* sung from beyond the grave, but in trying to transcribe the melody from the eerie way it lingered in his head caused him to lose sleep, lose his appetite, break out in fever, go insane, and eventually die in the process, never realizing his goal. “El sueño huyó de sus párpados y perdió el apetito, y la fiebre se apoderó de su cabeza, y se volvió

loco, y se murió en fin, sin poder terminar el *Miserere*" (180). The musician desired something he could never conquer, a status predetermined by the natural, or even supernatural, world. The result of the foolish detour that took the musician closer to what he thought would accomplish his lofty goal was angst, insanity, and eventually death. To desire an otherworldly experience while living in this world is foolish wishfulness and a quick path to perdition.

### **Maese Pérez el organista**

The theme of music so heavenly, so ethereal that it cannot be reproduced is seen similarly in the legend *Maese Pérez el organista*. The main protagonist, Maese Pérez, is not the one who reaps destruction, but rather any secondary organist who attempts to play in his stead after his death. Maese Pérez is a prodigy organist whose outstanding skill sharply contrasts his external state: humble in spirit, poor, blind since birth, and advanced in age. He has no other family than his daughter and no other friend than his organ (144). When he plays the keys of the organ, the music is so ornate and harmonious that it is like a voice that rises to the gates of heaven: "parecía una voz que se elevaba desde la tierra al cielo . . . en un torrente de atronadora armonía" (146-7). His ability to produce heavenly chords on this instrument becomes the object of covetousness for other organists. Maese Pérez' blindness does not hinder him, and his only hope to see is so that he might see the face of God soon, since he is older in years: "Tengo esperanzas [de ver] . . . y muy pronto -añade, sonriéndose como un ángel-. Ya cuento



setenta y seis años. Por muy larga que sea mi vida, pronto veré a Dios” (144). The desires of Maese Pérez are to see God face-to-face soon, and to faithfully and humbly play his organ at *la misa del Gallo*, the yearly ceremony of Holy Week at the cathedral of Santa Inés, until his time comes to die. His desires come to pass, and he plays his final *misa del Gallo* ceremony, sick in body, but fervent in spirit, breathing his last while seated at his beloved instrument.

A year after Maese Pérez’ death, an organist that is not regarded very highly by the parishioners comes to play in his place. One lady of the parish is of the opinion that the organ should remain silent this year out of respect for Maese Pérez. Others say that this substitute organist is arrogant and comes to profane the organ of Maese Pérez (149). Yet another lady knows him to be an unskilled musician because she heard him play a thousand times at his parish of San Bartolomé, and she had to cover her ears (151). Nevertheless, the arrogant organist approaches the instrument and begins to play the same celestial music that Maese Pérez used to play. The crowd is awestruck and gathers around to admire him after the service. Although most do not notice, the organist leaves the stage deathly pale, “con un color de difunto”, attempting to conceal his horror, “procurando dominar la emoción que se revelaba en la palidez de su rostro” (150-1). He lies about the reason why he will never, for all the gold in the world, return to play that organ, but the reader finds out later that it is because it was the spirit of Maese Pérez who was playing the keys the entire time, not the substitute organist. He accepts all the prestige and praise from the listeners, but never reveals the fact he

was actually being haunted by the very music that the listeners believed he was producing.

The repercussions of wrong desire in this legend, though just as haunting, are less violent than in others. The death of Maese Pérez was not a punishment for pursuing wrong desires, but possibly a reward for a faithful life of pure desires and devout servanthood. He died peacefully in old age and achieved his longing: to regain sight and behold the face of God upon death. A wrong desire to reproduce the exemplary artistry of Maese Pérez and glean similar status and recognition for a musical performance is seen, however, in the deceitful and arrogant actions of the substitute organist. His desire is to attain the same prestige by replacing Maese Pérez, an impossible objective because he lacks both skill and purity of heart. A transfer of desire to an inanimate object is seen, as well, as the organist attempts to play at Maese Pérez' organ during the same *misa del Gallo*. He sees Maese Pérez' organ, an object that should be lifeless in and of itself without the proficient touch of a musician, as the means to achieving his goal. The punishment comes by way of the organ itself, the same inanimate object, which mysteriously has become inhabited by the soul of Maese Pérez, whose music still emanates from the instrument without anyone's hands touching the keys. This haunting realization is the sum of the punishment felt by the substitute organist. He is not plagued by insanity or death, but is effectively chased away from the cathedral of Santa Inés for the rest of his life, haunted by an

otherworldly spirit who makes it unmistakably clear that imposters attempting to appropriate talent that is not theirs are not welcome.

### **Summary**

In these ten legends, we see a curious pattern in the way desire compels the protagonists to act and what the outcome of their actions is. This pattern consists of three stages. The first stage is the revealing of the protagonist's fixation. The object of the protagonist's desire also happens to be an unattainable object for reasons that vary from legend to legend. The problem, however, is that when desire transforms reality into myth, the exaggerated or idealized conception ultimately cannot be reached at all. Outside forces of nature ensure that the protagonist cannot realize these desires by devising his or her own plan of conquest.

The second stage is a transfer of desire to a secondary, representative object that the protagonist believes will bring him closer to the acquisition of the original desired object. With this transfer, the protagonist negotiates for himself or herself a detour, an imagined path that will accomplish this goal. Removing themselves further and further from reality, the protagonists become vulnerable to the forces of nature keeping them from obtaining the original desires. The protagonist is no longer controlled by reason or by his own sense of well-being, rather by the force of his desires that catapults him further into this false reality and toward perdition or loss.

The final stage is the violent repercussion of the protagonist's expedition that manifests itself in loss, pain, disillusionment, insanity, and

often death. In Bécquer's legends, the protagonists oftentimes attempt to negotiate a deal with spiritual forces. When they do so, they create a false reality that turns against them. The uncanny and uncomfortable transposition of human desire to physical objects backfires as nature itself and the underworld turn predator into prey, consuming the protagonists and their plots through a violent reestablishment of what "is" in Bécquer's legends: spiritual forces violently counter human designs to control them.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

Desire is the strongest motivating force behind the protagonists' actions in Bécquer's legends. It leads them to suffer consequences as a direct result of going against natural or societal norms in search of their own pleasure. In addition to embracing the hope for satisfaction provided by their object of desire, the protagonists embrace numerous other things along the way. Risk or danger is a prevalent theme that ought to be examined for its implications about the protagonists and their desires. The protagonists are worthy of legends because their obsessions, and their own will to control the *perception* of others, is so noteworthy – foolish, dangerous, and pitiful – but nevertheless noteworthy.

Some protagonists, such as Fernando in *Los ojos verdes*, hardly even take danger into consideration, darting into the enchanted forest even after words of warning from Íñigo. Danger is present, though maybe not recognized as a threat by the protagonists in these legends who consider themselves “above the natural law”, and it serves an important purpose in defining the object of desire as well as inciting interest in the mysterious for readers. Likewise, protagonists such as Pedro contemplate stealing the gold bracelet from the Virgin in *La ajorca de oro* or Alonso contemplates going out on the night of the souls in *El Monte de las Ánimas*, each recognizes the

danger at hand and verbalizes his apprehension but both agree to the quest because it fits the ultimate goal dictated by their obsession or fictional reality. These protagonists see better than anyone the peril before them, but they choose to embrace the risk because the pursuit of *their own will* trumps all reason.

Danger, physical or supernatural, exists in each legend because it is the thoughtless disregard for common sense that incites the reader's interest. The magnitude of the risk involved directly correlates to the magnitude of the protagonist's obsession and will to obtain the unobtainable. A half-hearted or mildly passionate character would not risk all and attempt the impossible, but a protagonist who deceives himself into "getting his own way" at all costs and at the expense of others is blinded by desire and heads directly toward peril and is summarily punished by the very nature that these protagonists seek to defy.

Protagonists risk all (status, life, limb, social standing, respect, title, etc.) for the object he or she desires. The narratives are "motored" by the protagonist's urge to control *the other* and this willfulness reflects the value protagonists place upon the desired object and the false sense of control they believe they have to affect the will of the other to their own selfish ends. The protagonists embrace a *flawed roadmap*, metaphorically speaking, to obtain personal objectives.

A clear example of the metaphorical "roadmap" can be found in *El Miserere*. The object that each protagonist in Bécquer's legend desires is not a

*wrong* desire in and of itself. It is the manner in which desire functions for these protagonists and how they act upon their desire. For example, the musician pilgrim in *El Miserere* did not wrongly desire forgiveness from God; in fact, that is a very exemplary thing to desire. The problem is that he went about it in the wrong “willful” way: he desired to produce music so celestial and awe-inspiring that, in effect, God would bow down before his musical offering and praise his fabricated production. He was attempting to earn forgiveness from God, rather than freely receiving it. Or, perhaps more pertinently, he was attempting to control the will of God. The willful distortion of who is in control directly opposes the nature and mandates of God. For this reason, the musician’s “roadmap” led him to seek out a *Miserere* sung by the tortured souls of those who died before being able to confess. Tapping into the underworld in order to achieve his purpose is what brought about the violent consequence of insanity and eventually death in this legend. Ultimately, the attempt to control the will of others, especially the will of God, is foolish, futile, and deadly.

Similarly, it is not a *wrong* desire in and of itself to desire to marry someone of a respectable social status, or a favored one of the king, such as in *El gnomo*, except when that desire is an attempt to control the perception of another for personal benefit. It would have been socially impossible for either of the orphan sisters to marry the man they had set their eyes on because they were orphans. The “flawed roadmap” is when, to affect the will of others, they enter the lands where evil spirits dwell, believing they can

uncover the source of secret riches and win favor that way. Again, the protagonists, specifically Marta who refuses to turn back, taps into evil, dark forces to get what she wants. Desiring marriage or even an out-of-reach husband is not the evil or danger here, but rather the act of attempting to concoct a way to change the will of another and to *affect free will* with the use of deception and evil forces.

Haunting and sometimes grotesque consequences are the result of tampering with the world of the unknown. The use of evil forces to affect free will is the topic that tested through the transfer of desire in legend after legend. The desired object is never obtained because the protagonists face destruction before they even come close to obtaining the object that represents the free will of another.

There is a fine line that distinguishes the good from the bad in how desire functions in Bécquer. It might seem that the author is advising the reader not pursue the 'beyond', or the ineffable, because it only harvests destruction, but evidence indicates otherwise. Since Bécquer was firmly rooted in the ideas of Romanticism, a literary movement that idealized the ineffable and exalted a pursuit of it – even to the death – it would be hasty to conclude that he is warning the reader against that very behavior. It seems, on the contrary, that Bécquer is actually advocating these types of desires: desires for something more, something that society or this physical life itself does not offer. Each and every legend paints the portrait of a character who is plagued by his or her desire for something more, which seems to indicate



that it is a legitimate pursuit: to marry whom they loved regardless of social or religious restrictions, rightstanding with God, to experience the divine, to embrace unmatched beauty or behold inexplicable aesthetic appeal. So, then, if there is nothing wrong with these protagonists' desire for the otherworldly or the inexplicable, and Bécquer along with other Romantic writers in fact endorsed it, why do these characters reap such horrific consequences, and what does that mean? The answer lies in the route the protagonists take to pursue their desires for their own benefit and at the expense of the free will of another, and this gives warning to the reader about how *not* to behave.

The significant supernatural or spiritual nature to each legend indicates that there is a moral lesson to be learned from the repeated manifestation of the theme. Bécquer wrote legend after legend with tragic endings that leave the reader aghast. There must be a reason that one legend alone does not suffice and accomplish the same mission. Sure enough, each legend offers a slightly different perspective, indicating that rich or poor, man or woman, young or old, there is no demographic free from corruption and error. Bécquer's texts give proof that many different types of people pursue their desires in the wrong way, and that to attempt to change the free will of another is the road to perdition. One commonality is that the characters who suffer consequences are all those who do not respect the human and spiritual nature that each person has free will. To manipulate the surrounding circumstances in order to still achieve what the natural world has prohibited is madness.

The repetition of foolish actions in over ten legends reemphasizes the point being made. Bécquer wrote these legends as advice and warning to his readers, in the same way that certain characters within his legends (Fernando of *El Monte de las Ánimas*, Íñigo of *Los ojos verdes*, Tío Gregorio of *El gnomo*, the shepherd boy in *La corza blanca*, the monks in *El Miserere*) warn the protagonists about the dangers that lie ahead and advise avoidance of them. The overarching repetition of what happens to those who challenge the system within the legend serves as a warning, a voice of reason, or an advisory against undesirable consequences to the protagonist. The broader legend, the one written by Bécquer, is likewise a warning to the reader against the same wrongful actions: to pursue an unattainable object in a manipulative, arrogant, or conniving way for personal benefit is madness and punishable, though entirely human. Human error is, as Bécquer demonstrates in the legend, fascinating, mysterious, and worthy of note.

The reason these protagonists make the mistakes they do is because of the corruption in their hearts. The best example is the parallel quest of Marta and Magdalena in *El gnomo*. Marta is described as *altiva*, or arrogant, while Magdalena is described as *humilde*, or humble (Bécquer 195). Arrogance is the common characteristic in all the protagonists who suffer consequences in these legends; these protagonists see themselves as “above” the natural law, and they believe that the consequences will not affect them. The contrast is illustrated by the respective fate of the sisters. Both sisters desire the same unrealistic object, and both sisters are tempted into

transferring their desire to a secondary object, going against Tío Gregorio's advice. At a certain point in the narrative, Marta pressed on while Magdalena resisted and turned back. Marta gave into temptation and was never heard of again while Magdalena made it back to her town safely. This proves that having an unrealistic desire is not enough to merit punishment, and even being tempted and nearly succumbing is not enough, because Magdalena experienced both and escaped unscathed. The amoral action deserving punishment is giving in to temptation and resolving to achieve the desired object at all costs. Those who escape destruction by the supernatural forces are the ones who heed any warnings and turn back from danger.

In conclusion, Bécquer does not write fifteen legends with the same lesson in order to reemphasize that everyone ought to follow society's rules. Romantics, like Bécquer, were defined by their fascination with those who rejected society and pursued the ineffable and the elusive, the rebels of society. Neither do the narratives he wrote advocate that a person seek their own humiliation or devastation, or simply pursue the feelings of desire without a care about satisfaction. It is clear through the compounding factor of unrealistic hope and an arrogant desire to trump free will that these protagonists indeed believe they can obtain what they set out to appropriate. They desire an object and they hope for the realization of it, or satisfaction by it. Textual evidence suggests, rather, that a person is justified in desiring the idyllic, wanting more, and not settling for the predetermined regulations set

by society, but condemned in arrogantly pursuing it in ways that offend God and that disregard the free will of another.

Bécquer successfully weaves together elements of mystery, the supernatural and “otherworldly”, violence, and horror, all byproducts from the common force of desire, to hold his readers’ attention captive until the delightfully chilling end to each legend is revealed. The pervasive human tendency toward rebellion is keenly felt in these narrations which detail the catastrophic results of protagonists whose egotistical quests lead them astray.

Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer’s legends have been celebrated for centuries, and will continue to be savored for generations to come because of his unique ability to intertwine the complexities of human behavior with a hair-raising storyline that leaves the reader spellbound and wanting more.

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