

Sacrifice, Scapegoating, and Mimetic Desire: A Girardian Reading of Clarín's *La Regenta*

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In this study, I employ the theory of René Girard (1923-2015) to analyze an overlooked secondary character from Clarín's *La Regenta* (1884-85), perhaps Spain's most important nineteenth-century novel. The character, Víctor Quintanar, provides a useful template for the application of Girard's innovative writings on mimetic desire, sacrifice, and scapegoating. Specifically, this article focuses on an important scene from the final chapter of the novel, in which Quintanar participates in a duel with his wife's lover. By using a Girardian approach, I demonstrate how Quintanar's decision not to kill is non-honorable, just as Christ's death on the cross is non-sacrificial, as Girard argues. In his case, Quintanar breaks with the Spanish honor code by deciding not to seek revenge. Similarly, Christ departs from the traditional sacrificial order by being innocent. While a Girardian reading has been previously applied to Clarín's novel (James Mandrell, 1990), that study does not address Víctor Quintanar, nor does it incorporate sacrifice and scapegoating, two of Girard's essential themes. As a result, I believe that this study offers a new analysis of the novel, by revealing both the allure of the text as well as the utility of Girardian theory. This study consists of three primary sections. First, I evaluate Quintanar's reputation by analyzing what several critics have asserted in Clarinian scholarship. Second, I question much of this criticism by referencing textual examples. Lastly, a new analysis of the final chapter of *La Regenta* is offered that highlights Quintanar's virtue by employing a Girardian-Christian reading.¹

In *La Regenta*, Leopoldo Alas (Clarín) presents a troubled protagonist, Ana Ozores, a dissatisfied, beautiful woman married to a kind, yet detached man thirty years her senior, named Víctor. After having grown up in relative poverty, Ana finds financial refuge in marrying Quintanar, the former magistrate of Vetusta, even though she has never been in love with him. Her discontent with her marriage and her antipathy toward provincial life lead to a failed spiritual quest and ultimately to adultery. Ana's infidelity induces her husband's tragic death, as well as her subsequent social alienation. Understandably, the alluring and timeless topic of adultery has been discussed more than the death of Quintanar. Furthermore, on the rare occasions when critics have addressed Víctor, he has

¹ I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers of *L'Érudit franco-espagnol* for their insightful commentary and to Joy Curry for her skillful editing.

generally been discarded as a pitiable and insignificant character, with very little bearing on the overall meaning of the novel. However, I wish to question the conventional perception of the former magistrate. While he is by no means a valiant figure throughout the novel, he is also not pusillanimous, as some critics have suggested.

For the sake of specificity, I highlight some of the most well-known scholarship on Quintanar, which has been unfavorable. Monroe Z. Hafter's reading exemplifies the traditional perception of Víctor: "Don Víctor Quintanar . . . enjoys in private the thrill of imagining himself a gallant swordsman out of a Calderonian play, but when the unhappy wretch is forced to become in real life a vengeful, honor-bound husband, he meets an ignoble death" (326). While Hafter is correct in underscoring the unhappiness of Quintanar after discovering Ana's affair, I disagree with his interpretation of Víctor's death. Because Quintanar consciously chooses to reject the Spanish honor code to which Hafter refers and instead forgives his wife's lover, Álvaro Mesía, I submit that his death is not ignoble, for it is a choice based upon forgiveness. It is precisely because Quintanar elects not to be an "honor-bound husband" that he perishes, not because he attempts to do so and fails. In addition, in reviewing *La Regenta*, Marvin Mudrick offers a scathing critique of Víctor. When discussing Quintanar's close friend and confidant Tomás Crespo, also known as Frígilis, Mudrick opines: "Quintanar has a far larger role than Frígilis, and in addition a less ephemeral presence: a silly, fussy, self-important little man; a good man who talks a lot, gets in the way, and learns nothing except that goodness isn't good enough . . ." (148). While I agree that Quintanar does have his share of stubborn idiosyncrasies, I do not find him to be "silly" at all. Quintanar has significant cultural and social capital, as well as is married to the most coveted woman in Vetusta. Furthermore, Mudrick's assertion regarding Víctor's self-importance is quite extreme in my view, given that Víctor ultimately decides not to seek revenge on his wife or his wife's lover. Actually, he places the importance of their lives—the lives of those who have betrayed him—above his.

In Frank Durand's excellent study on the chronological structure of *La Regenta*, he too offers a caustic appraisal of Quintanar: "Chapter X, beginning in her home where she again refuses the invitation [of Álvaro], presents Ana's state of mind, her boredom and self-pity, and her fluctuations from the justification of don Victor [sic] as a wonderful husband to the realization that he is a fool" ("Structural Unity" 327). It is necessary to underscore that the sentiments of Ana to which Durand refers occur early in the first volume of the novel, when Víctor is indeed too disconnected from his wife. However, to dwell on Ana's capricious exasperation with her husband because of his idiosyncrasies is an unfair assessment of her overall outlook on Víctor throughout the novel. While Ana is indeed sometimes very frustrated with her husband's quirks, to suggest that she regards her own husband as "a fool" is certainly inaccurate, for notwithstanding her criticisms of Quintanar, and indeed there are many, she holds many affectionate feelings for him as well.

Thankfully, some scholarship has been more reasonable regarding Quintanar. Noël Valis correctly observes the serious flaws of the relationship between Ana and her husband, as well as perceives Víctor to be significantly more paternal than romantic: "The magistrate, with whom Ana enjoys a father-daughter relationship, physically suggests the image of a venerable and even heroic general; but Víctor is impotent in both spirit and sex" (*Decadent* 84). Similarly, Collin McKinney observes a paternal relationship between the husband and wife, by referring to Quintanar as Ana's "fatherly husband" (60). While the

readings of Valis and McKinney regarding Víctor are by no means flattering, they are more charitable. However, it is my contention that Quintanar's spirit is not impotent by the final chapter of the novel, as Valis claims. Instead, his spirit is robust and valiant, for he chooses to be killed instead of to kill for the sake of forgiveness. Concerning the final chapter of the novel, in which Víctor confronts his wife's lover Álvaro in a duel, Valis notes: "Don Víctor has been forced to discover that it is always difficult to be human. . . . He assumes the role of the outraged, betrayed husband, goes through the motions of a duel, and is killed for his pains" (88). While Valis' views are certainly fair, I believe that two points regarding Víctor are important to emphasize. First, he is not merely killed but chooses to be killed. After all, Quintanar is an expert marksman and could have easily killed Álvaro, but instead forgives him and resists violence. Second, based upon my previous assertion, I believe that Quintanar is killed much more for his own forgiveness than for his own pains.

With respect to the forgiveness that Quintanar extends to his rival, some critics have recognized Víctor's change of heart and therefore hold him in much higher regard. Pieter Wesseling affirms that Álvaro has killed "a good and innocent man" (396). As A. Richard Hartman observes: "Víctor's rejection of the demands of the honor tragedy is definitive. . . . On one trajectory, Víctor is moving towards a clear-headed recognition of his wrongs as a husband and is developing a benevolent attitude towards both Ana and Álvaro" (263). Hartman recognizes how Víctor rejects his once-beloved Golden Age honor code of revenge and chooses benevolence instead. It is my reading that this rejection to which Hartman refers is based upon forgiveness. Hartman continues: "Although an expert marksman, when the day of the real duel with Álvaro arrives, Víctor decides not to shoot to kill. This refusal provides the final confirmation of his deep-set loathing for the taking of human life" (264). In contrast to Valis, Hartman underscores Víctor's decision not to kill, instead of merely the action of being killed. The latter is a consequence of the former. In addition, regarding Víctor's transformation as a character, Eric Pennington observes: "forgiveness and the sparing of human life are now more precious to Víctor than any nostalgic conception of honor and vengeance," and that Víctor "operates on a higher moral plane than those around him" ("Refractions" 248, 243). Therefore, Wesseling, Hartman, and Pennington all deserve credit for extending charity toward Quintanar. While they do not perceive his character to be as important as I do in this study, they have started a necessary and important dialogue on Quintanar, a character who is obviously worth revisiting.

Moreover, while critics such as Durand, Hafter, and Mudrick overlook Víctor's significance in the novel, I find it interesting that of all of the major characters in *La Regenta*, Víctor is the only one who even comes close to possessing virtuous qualities. Fermín is a hypocritical and lustful canon theologian who controls Ana psychologically. Álvaro is the surrogate Don Juan, as Pennington states ("Structuring" 170), guilty of having an affair with his dear friend's wife. Ana, though not completely devoid of virtue, is ultimately an adulterous wife and indirectly responsible for her husband's death. As a result, *La Regenta* is indeed a dark novel: "una novela densamente crítica y profundamente triste," as Gonzalo Sobejano affirms (28). As Valis correctly asserts, "One can never utter the final word on a work as complex and disturbing as *La Regenta*" ("Order and Meaning" 257). Moreover, the critic writes: "What Alas demonstrates is a society that has slipped so far into the depths of decadence that it has lost all belief, whether secular or religious" (*Decadent* 54). Without question, *La Regenta* is an attractive work by virtue of its

scandalous nature. After all, the novel contains all of the elements of a contemporary Hollywood film: beauty, wealth, infidelity, envy, revenge, and murder (Herda 1-2). However, within this saturnine and sinful world there is also light, if one is willing to look for it. Therefore, I have provided an account of what some of the most notable Clarinian scholars have written regarding Quintanar, hopefully to grant an adequate context for my argument. As one can see, for the most part, scholarly criticism has not been very favorable to Quintanar, though there have been some positive signs in recent scholarship.

Now, I analyze some key textual passages in order to question some of the more dismissive criticism of Víctor that I have highlighted. Regarding the narrator's physical descriptions of Víctor, he is clearly presented as a distinguished, robust, and intrepid gentleman: "Y había sido hermoso, no cabía duda. Verdad era que sus cincuenta y tantos años parecían sesenta; pero sesenta años de una robustez envidiable; . . . sus cejas grises le daban venerable y hasta heroico aspecto de brigadier y aun de general" (1: 230). Furthermore, there is the description of Víctor's numerous talents, including his well-known reputation as a good shot: "Pero su mayor habilidad estaba en el manejo de la pistola; encendía un fósforo con una bala a veinticinco pasos, mataba un mosquito a treinta y se lucía con otros ejercicios por el estilo. Pero no era jactancioso" (1: 236). Thus, Quintanar, despite his several faults, is portrayed in *La Regenta* as a capable, distinguished, and humble man who values human life, even if at the expense of his own. However, since so few studies have been dedicated to him, readers have been left with characterizations from secondary sources that begin to shape their understandings of Ana's husband, which I believe is a disservice to the text.

While the aesthetic and character descriptions of Quintanar are useful and important, it is the last chapter of *La Regenta* in which the reader truly grasps the positive portrayal of the former magistrate. This is logical, of course, because in this chapter Víctor demonstrates the height of his virtue when he engages in the duel with his wife's lover, Álvaro. However, before an analysis of this significant and moving scene, it is important to briefly summarize what leads to the dramatic encounter between Víctor and Álvaro. After dancing at the ball with Álvaro in Chapter 24, Ana has become more attracted to him, and this attraction culminates in their affair, which occurs at the Vegallanas' countryside villa between Chapters 27 and 28. In this bucolic setting, Ana has symbolically rejected religion and embraced the physical pleasures that she has been denied in her marriage. The licentious priest Fermín, also invited to the retreat, has abruptly gone home after realizing that he can no longer control his coveted parishioner, Ana. Furthermore, after Fermín has been informed by Petra, the maid of the Quintanar estate, that Álvaro has been climbing the balcony every night to sleep with Ana, he is overcome with jealousy and rage, which leads him to have a meeting with Quintanar, in which as a priest he ironically encourages Víctor to seek revenge instead of offer forgiveness.

During the dark encounter between Fermín and Quintanar, the vicar general is initially concerned that Víctor has elected not to pursue vengeance, which greatly concerns the priest: "Entonces se alarmó don Fermín; creyó que había perdido terreno, y volvió a la carga. Con vivos colores pintó el desprecio que el mundo arroja sobre el marido que perdona . . ." (2: 567). It is striking how a man of the cloth is disappointed that a distraught husband has not immediately decided to seek revenge against his wife's lover. This decision would stymie Fermín's plan of harming Álvaro, whom he hates and wants to see

killed. Therefore, the priest then begins to talk about the obligation that Víctor has to restore his public honor and finally convinces Quintanar to seek revenge, much to the priest's satisfaction: "Don Fermín volvió a tranquilizarse, viendo la exaltación de la ira pintada en el magistrado. 'Sí, había hombre; la máquina estaba dispuesta; el cañón con que él, don Fermín, iba a disparar su odio de muerte, ya estaba cargado hasta la boca'" (2: 567). Quite simply, the vicar general gets Víctor to do his dirty work for him, as he cowardly uses an emotionally broken man as a pawn to eradicate his rival, Álvaro, in order to restore his perverse relationship with Ana to its former glory.

As a result of the priest's sinister machinations, the duel is set between Quintanar and Mesía in Chapter 30, which I believe is the most dramatic and profound chapter of the entire novel. There, the virtue of forgiveness is developed most palpably, as readers are given the opportunity to decide the merits of a Christian reading of *La Regenta*. While the topic of Clarín's complex belief system and the portrayal of Catholicism have been debated for several decades in Clarinian scholarship, I wish to briefly review some critics' readings with respect to the issue of faith in the novel. Robert Avrett maintains, "The Church, or certain individuals in it, is made the target of devastating satire, along with the foibles and hypocrisies of society" (224). In addition, Kathy Bacon states: "The novel has often been interpreted as anticlerical, but it has also simultaneously been read as evidence for its author's 'religiosity,' in the sense that it is seen as attacking inauthentic or hypocritical expressions of religion, rather than spiritual aspirations in themselves" (91). Moreover, Joan Ramon Resina writes, "Clarín's indictment of the clergy is, however, more nuanced than ordinary anticlerical novels" (232). In addition, Stephanie A. Sieburth asserts, "Alas may be portrayed as sacrilegious or as a staunch defender of the Catholic faith" (5). Similarly, regarding the complex belief system of Clarín, Valis writes: "He struggled with belief most of his life, and that struggle spills over into his writing, which bears the stamp of his inner turmoil" (*Sacred* 152). All of the aforementioned criticism is similar in that it is correctly cautious of generalizing and labeling *La Regenta* and instead focuses on the importance of specificity, which can be done by analyzing each character individually. Avrett underscores the individual hypocrisy, Sieburth underlines inauthentic religiosity instead of spirituality, and Resina correctly highlights the shades of the narrator's criticism in the text. Finally, Valis shows how all of these interpretations are appropriate, given that Clarín's belief system is not easy to summarize. However, because of the multiplicity of views regarding the portrayal of religion in *La Regenta*, I am fully convinced that a Girardian-Christian reading of the novel is entirely appropriate.

René Girard, the twentieth-century philosopher and literary critic, demonstrates how desires are not original but imitative of a model who often becomes a rival, because he or she possesses what is desired—the object. Thus, the subject covets what the model has—the object—and consequently, rivalry between the subject and model is inevitable. Girard's innovative theory, known as "mimetic desire" or "triangular desire," has proven to be an indispensable lens through which to analyze the often impulsive, irrational, and violent nature of human behavior. Direct yet at once profound, mimetic desire articulates for us what we already know at some level: we want what others have, and we want it badly. Girard asserts: "Once I desire what a model fairly close to me in time and space desires, with a view to bringing the object I covet through him within my grasp, I try to take this object away from him—and so rivalry . . . becomes inevitable" (*One* 5). In addition, Girard

explains how society often fails to understand the origin of our vices, which are based upon triangular desire: "... we do not see that jealousy and envy, like hatred, are scarcely more than traditional names given to internal mediation, names which almost always conceal their true nature from us" (*Girard* 40). Therefore, instead of merely issuing labels such as jealousy and envy when analyzing human behavior, we must study the causality of such traits. Girard explains the importance of discovering the root causes of jealousy and in turn focuses on how the cause is a pattern present in nearly every instance of violence. We must understand *why* something is, not simply *what* something is, as Girard informs us: "... the true secret of conflict and violence is mimetic desire" (*One* 8).

Moreover, while mimetic desire is normally destructive due to rivalry, it can occasionally be constructive. However, this triangular desire is not internal but external, and there is no threat of mimetic rivalry. Girard refers to the external mediation in *Don Quixote*, in which the protagonist imitates the storied knight-errant Amadís de Gaula in seeking his own chivalric adventures. Amadís is a figure from literature, which precludes him from being a rival to the Spanish hidalgo. In this triangle, the object is chivalric honor. Perhaps the best example of external mediation is Christianity, in which the believer seeks to be like his or her model, Christ, with the object being holiness. Girard notes: "Chivalric existence is the *imitation* of Amadís [*sic*] in the same sense that the Christian's existence is the imitation of Christ" (*Girard* 34; emphasis in original). Jesus is not a threat to the subject and consequently not a rival either, just as Amadís is not a threat to Don Quixote, as Girard underscores. Thus, while it is much less common than internal mediation, external mediation is a positive mimetic desire, since the subject yearns to be like his or her model, without the danger of mimetic rivalry.

As I mentioned in the introduction, Mandrell has previously applied a Girardian reading to *La Regenta*, by analyzing the roles of internal and external mediation in the novel. Mandrell ably explains the mimetic rivalry between Álvaro and Fermín, as well as offers an insightful reading of external mediation, by emphasizing the role of José Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio* in the text and how the famous protagonist from Spanish romanticism serves as a model for Álvaro: "Far from rivaling Don Álvaro, Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio* supports him in his quest to conquer La Regenta" (18). This external rivalry is similar to the Don Quixote-Amadís mediation, but with entirely different objects. Here, Álvaro's object is the sexual conquest of Ana Ozores, not chivalric honor. However, while Mandrell's study is superb, it is limited to the topic of mimetic desire and does not analyze other Girardian topics—notably, sacrifice and scapegoating. In addition, his reading does not address the role of Víctor Quintanar, whom I analyze in this paper. Therefore, I believe that an additional Girardian reading that includes more themes and other characters is necessary. To that end, I first review my interpretation of mimetic desire in the text and later analyze the roles of sacrifice and scapegoating.

In *La Regenta*, there is mimetic desire based on internal mediation, which leads to the duel scene between Quintanar and Álvaro in Chapter 30. The main triangle of internal mediation positions the covetous priest Fermín as the subject, the playboy Álvaro as the model, and Ana as the object. Wesseling maintains: "Stated in the simplest terms, *La Regenta's* base is a love-triangle. Its action is determined by the competition of two handsome, talented, and socially prominent men for the favors of the local paragon of grace and beauty" (394). Wesseling is correct, as *La Regenta* is an ideal example of two men after

the same woman. Regarding the two rivals, Gloria Ortiz notes how Fermín pretends to be concerned for Ana's soul in order to gain access to her, while Álvaro is solely interested in her body (69). Eventually, the priest, consumed by his uncontrollable jealousy, wishes to kill Ana's lover, Álvaro. Curiously, in this triangle, Ana's husband Víctor is not the model, as would normally be the case in traditional love triangles, but is still used in the triangle to exact revenge for Fermín. Fermín is too cowardly to risk his own life by engaging in his mimetic rivalry with Álvaro, so he recruits Víctor to exact his revenge under the guise of defending Víctor's honor. In contrast to many other critics, I find the violence in the novel more interesting than the adultery that prompts it. While we all have grown accustomed to hearing the nouns sex and violence uttered in the same sentence, Girard explains why that is precisely the case, due to mimetic rivalry: "Sexuality leads to quarrels, jealous rages, mortal combats. It is a permanent source of disorder even within the most harmonious of communities" (*Violence* 35). This disorder, of course, is a consequence of mimetic desire, as Girard states: "Mimetism is a source of continual conflict. By making one man's desire into a replica of another man's desire, it invariably leads to rivalry; and rivalry in turn transforms desire into violence" (169). Thus, the rivalry between Fermín and Álvaro has transformed into the violence of the duel in Chapter 30, in which Víctor confronts his wife's lover to preserve his honor.

For the most part, the duel scene in *La Regenta* has been overlooked in Clarinian scholarship. Moreover, when it has been discussed, the readings have not been as close as they should be for such an important chapter in the novel. Let us first summarize what occurs. Quintanar, a skilled marksman, could easily kill his wife's lover Álvaro, thereby ending the conflict and restoring his social honor at the same time.² Previously, Víctor contemplated carrying out revenge on Álvaro after seeing Ana's lover climb down from her balcony in the early morning. The narrator describes Quintanar's anguish after he witnessed proof of his wife's adultery with his own eyes, just as he was departing with his friend Frígilis to go hunting: "... estaba triste hasta la muerte, ahogándose entre lágrimas heladas; sentía la herida, comprendía todo lo ingrata que era ella, pero ... no podría matarla. Al otro sí; Álvaro tenía que morir ..." (2: 536). However, since that time, Quintanar has decided that forgiveness triumphs over revenge and elects the teachings of Christ over the theatrics of Calderón. Regarding Víctor's acceptance of religion and his rejection of Calderonian honor, Manuel C. Lassaletta affirms: "Él es un gran tirador y habría podido matar impunemente a su infamador. Sin embargo, los nobles pensamientos pesan en él más que prejuicios anacrónicos y su notoria afición a los dramas de capa y espada ..." (867). Thus, the former judge places philosophical reflection above emotionality, and before the event he has elected to forgive his treacherous former friend. In short, Quintanar has chosen mercy over revenge: "A don Víctor se le saltaron las lágrimas al ver a su enemigo. En aquel instante hubiera gritado de buena gana: ¡perdono! ¡perdono!... como Jesús en la cruz!" (2: 578). What a remarkable reaction to misfortune: Álvaro has slept with Quintanar's wife, subsequently tarnishing the former judge's honor and effectively ruining his marriage, yet Quintanar forgives him, by using Christ's death on the cross as his model

² Carol Bingham Kirby distinguishes social honor from personal honor: "*Honor*, or *honra*, includes one's own sense of integrity and wholeness (personal honor), as well as what others think of one (social honor, reputation, or what some authors have called *el quedarán*)" (12).

of forgiveness. Therefore, Víctor meticulously grazes Álvaro's pants with a bullet instead of shooting him fatally. Tragically, Álvaro responds quickly with a fatal bullet, which lodges into the noble judge's bladder and kills him shortly afterward: "Murió Quintanar a las once de la mañana" (2: 580). In preserving the life of Álvaro, Quintanar loses his own.

Some of the finest Clarinian scholars have not fully appreciated the significance of Quintanar's death. For example, when analyzing the duel scene, Durand opines: "Don Víctor's obsession with Calderón's plays, in which he imagines what he would feel and do if his wife were unfaithful to him, is totally different from his feelings and actions when fiction becomes reality and he must deal with this situation" ("Structure" 152). Indeed, Quintanar's actions differ completely from the Calderonian worldview that he previously held, and that difference is precisely the whole point of his transformation. If there were no difference between Víctor's erstwhile beliefs and what he does upon facing Álvaro, then my whole argument would be tenuous. However, there is a major difference because of Víctor's spiritual change, not because of his inability to deal with reality, as Durand argues. Quintanar could easily "deal with" it by shooting Álvaro to death, but he does not. As, Miriam Wagner Rice asserts, "Quintanar, who never in his life felt himself in conflict with society, finally detaches himself from the social structure by his decision not to kill his wife's lover. His spiritual elevation in the duel scene is what makes him vulnerable to Álvaro's bullet; it is the weakness that causes his annihilation" (150). To Rice's credit, in contrast to other scholars, at least she is aware of the spiritual ascension of Quintanar and does not completely disregard such a clear character transformation. However, I disagree with characterizing Víctor's decision not to kill Álvaro as "weakness"; on the contrary, it is a conscientious and intrepid decision to allow oneself to be killed instead of to kill. Indeed, Víctor is vulnerable to Álvaro's lethal bullet, but he chooses that vulnerability as a result of the forgiveness that he has elected to grant his wife's lover. Furthermore, I do not regard Víctor's death as "annihilation," because his legacy of forgiveness lives on to serve as an example for others. After his death, Ana keeps the Ozores' mansion, which is a metonymy of her husband, and receives a significant pension. Were it not for Víctor's generosity, then Ana would be cast out on the street. The Church, personified by Fermín, shows no interest in helping her. She survives because of her husband's compassion, even after his death.

Forgiveness is not a consequence of weakness or ambivalence, but instead an indication of enormous strength. Furthermore, it is revealing how Quintanar ponders Christ's crucifixion upon deciding to forgive his wife's lover, and subsequently faces death for doing so. According to Girardian external mediation, Víctor's model is Christ, and the object is forgiveness. In that case, the mimetic desire is refreshingly positive, and Víctor carries out Christ's most difficult teaching: forgiveness of one's enemies. Just as Christ was not weak to allow himself to be crucified, Víctor is not weak to allow himself to be killed by Álvaro. We need to view forgiveness more favorably and understand that it is much harder to forgive one's enemy instead of seek revenge.

Girard's theory of the non-sacrificial death of Christ is also useful in demonstrating that, just as Christ ended violence by not resisting it, Quintanar seeks to end the perpetuation of violence caused by the Spanish honor code. First, I want to analyze Girard's remarkably innovative (and controversial) reading of Christ's death and later I illustrate how Víctor uses Christ's decision in his external mediation. Regardless of whether one believes in the Christian narrative, one has to admit that what Girard proposes is provocative, since his

approach is more anthropological than theological. The former, of course, has historically had much more credibility than the latter. When analyzing the crucifixion, Girard contrasts Jesus' death with other traditional forms of sacrifice, which marks an important distinction overlooked by many theologians. Girard argues: "The Christ of the Gospels dies against sacrifice, and through his death, he reveals its nature and origin by making sacrifice unworkable, at least in the long run, and bringing sacrificial culture to an end" (*Girard* 18). According to Girard, Christ ends the culture of sacrifice with his death, thus revealing the inability of sacrifice to truly restore peace and harmony in society.

Sacrifice works only for a certain period, after which a community frantically searches for yet another sacrificial victim to ensure that its enmity is turned outward instead of inward. Therefore, society is constantly looking for scapegoats, as Girard explains: "... society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a 'sacrificeable' victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members ..." (*Girard* 73). In addition, according to Girard, the whole point of sacrifice is to mitigate violence: "The sacrificial process prevents the spread of violence by keeping vengeance in check" (87). For millennia, communities have engaged in collective scapegoating, using sacred violence as a means to maintain social order. Communities find a victim, or surrogate victim, and transfer its internal strife upon him or her, thereby hoping to quickly extinguish the flames of internal rivalry. However, according to Girard, Jesus' death was meant to end this constant need for sacrifice.

Furthermore, as Girard explains, Jesus seeks to end the pattern of sacred violence by not resisting it: "To say that Jesus dies, not as a sacrifice, but in order that there may be no more sacrifices, is to recognize in him the Word of God: 'I wish for mercy and not sacrifices'" (*Girard* 184). Consequently, a Girardian interpretation of Christ's death explains how Jesus terminates the need for sacrifice by allowing himself to be killed. He does not protest his death, and his death is not sacrificial, but an act of love instead. While Girard would later become more sympathetic to thinkers who cherish the term *sacrifice* in a "special sense" (*Girard* 280), he would maintain that Christ was killed "in order to put an end to sacrifice, as we are now able to understand through mimetic theory" (*One* 41). For that reason, his non-sacrificial reading of Christ's death is truly pioneering and worthy of consideration.

In *La Regenta*, just as Christ conquers violence by not resisting it (*Girard* 191) and subsequently ending the need for sacrifice, Víctor Quintanar seeks to end the perpetuation of violence caused by the Spanish honor code: "... la filosofía y la religión triunfaban en el ánimo de don Víctor. Estaba decidido a no matar" (2: 577). In the context of nineteenth-century Spain, the words Spanish and honor were nearly synonymous, as Kirby notes: "The concept of honor is fundamental to Spanish culture and has been an essential theme in Spanish literature since the *Poema de mio Cid*, where both personal honor and social honor are presented as essential to one's being and existence" (12). Yet, Víctor decides to forfeit his reputation by choosing forgiveness over vengeance. Once guided by the *comedias* of Calderón, Quintanar has embraced Christ's message of unconditional love, and in doing so, defeated the perpetual murder of the honor code. As with sacrifice, the Spanish honor code is insatiable, for it is based on revenge, scapegoating, and violence. However, the former magistrate chooses mercy instead, and dies because of it. In the novel, Víctor specifically refers to Christ as his model in the external mediation that guides his courageous decision

and leads to his death. Thus, just as the Girardian interpretation of Christ's death holds that it was non-sacrificial, the death of Víctor Quintanar is non-honorable. He dies not out of honor but out of forgiveness; Quintanar dies against honor as Christ dies against sacrifice.

Reading Víctor's death through a Girardian lens fosters opportunities for further studies on this character, *La Regenta*, and Clarín's worldview. By reconsidering Quintanar, readers can discover more shades of meaning in *La Regenta*. Instead of being merely another European novel about adultery and upper-class ennui, Víctor's death encourages us to reflect on other significant themes. Specifically, a Girardian analysis encourages Clarinian scholarship to reexamine the role of religion and belief in the text. While the novel is ostensibly anticlerical, it is not necessarily anti-Christian, as G. G. Brown observes regarding Clarín: "... behind his criticism of the Church there is a genuine respect for the basic Catholic values which are being abused by bad priests and bad Catholics" (26). The forgiveness of Quintanar is the alternative to the corruption of the Catholic Church, personified by Fermín, who is indeed a bad Catholic. Therefore, not only does Quintanar's death demonstrate how he breaks with the Spanish honor code, it also underscores his moral superiority over other characters in the novel, most notably Fermín, who embodies the hypocrisy of Restoration Spain.

Although there is criticism of the Catholic Church as an institution in *La Regenta*, that does not mean that individual belief is disparaged, particularly in analyses of Quintanar's death. That seemingly insignificant part of character is vital for interpreting the novel through a Christian prism, notwithstanding the anticlerical nature of the text. As a result, Girardian theory on mimetic desire, sacrifice, and scapegoating offers a new approach to *La Regenta* that provides a unique perspective on such a meaningful Spanish novel.

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