Angel Babies Ascending to Heaven a Family Saga of Death Across Cultures

Heidi Riboldi

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/studentpub_uht

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/studentpub_uht/224

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
Honors Thesis

ANGEL BABIES ASCENDING TO HEAVEN
A FAMILY SAGA OF DEATH ACROSS CULTURES

by
Heidi B. Riboldi

Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of graduation requirements for University Honors

History Department
Brigham Young University
April 2022

Advisor: Jeffrey M. Shumway
Honors Coordinator: Daren Ray
ABSTRACT

ANGEL BABIES ASCENDING TO HEAVEN
A FAMILY SAGA OF DEATH ACROSS CULTURES

Heidi B. Riboldi
History Department
Bachelor of Arts

This thesis is a microhistory focused on infant death and burial practices in Spain and Argentina at the turn of the twentieth century. The study uses primary sources from biographical journal pages, vital records, and notarial documents. The biographical journal pages are eleven loose pages written by Pablo Montaña that provide information about his family's births, marriages, and deaths, for four generations. Vital records for birth, marriage, and death events were found in the local parish and municipal archives in Cañizo, Spain, and the Catholic Diocese Archive in Zamora, Spain, Archivo Histórico Diocesano de Zamora. Notarial records like wills and land sales were found in the provincial archive in Zamora, Spain, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Zamora. This microhistory follows Pablo Montaña and Exuperancia Fernández San Juan from their hometown of Cañizo, Zamora, Spain to Rosario, Santa Fe, Argentina. Within a migration framework, the story develops around the themes of Catholic death rituals and doctrine, cemeteries and burial, and disease and healthcare. Even though this microhistory follows a particular family, place, and time, it also connects to a broader theme of how people, societies, and cultures remember, grieve, and deal with loss.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The debts I have acquired during this microhistory research are great. Chief among all is the love, encouragement, and many tender mercies I received from my merciful Heaving Father, to whom I owe everything.

My inestimable appreciation goes to my family for their encouragement, love, and support. I am grateful to Anne Riboldi, for her beautiful artistic rendition of the maps. I owe my sincere appreciation to Graciela Amiel Riboldi for reading the manuscript, providing her memories of her grandmother, Exuperancia, and offering digital pictures of Pablo Montaña’s biographical pages.

This research received generous support resulting in archival work experience in Spain from the Center for Family History and Genealogy (CFHG) for the Meliton G. Trejo Grant, the Harold B. Lee Library Student Research Grant, the Family Home and Social Sciences Internship Grant, and the Global Opportunity Scholarship. This Honors Thesis research drew on support from the BYU History Department Experiential Learning Grant and Honors Thesis Research Grant giving invaluable support for archival research in Spain. It drew on the vital work and resources of the archivists working in the Archivo Histórico Diocesano de Zamora, and the Archivo Histórico Provincial de Zamora, Cañizo’s Municipal and Church archivist, for which I am deeply grateful.

I have been incredibly blessed with the Ruiz Miranda family's friendship and local historical expertise in Cañizo, Spain. I could have never discovered the local treasures of Cañizo's land, people, and religious customs without their guidance, for which I am eternally grateful.
For their professional and educational support, I give special thanks to Dr. George and Peggy Ryskamp, who inspired me with a love of Spanish Family History and archival research. Professor Jill Crandell and Julie Stoddard provided me with opportunities to learn through practice in the CFHG lab. I am grateful for Dr. Craig Harline, who mentored me in microhistory writing by word and example.

I am particularly grateful to my Honors Thesis Committee, who favored me with their expertise and educational support: Dr. Jeffrey Shumway, Dr. Amy Harris, and Dr. Daren Ray. I am very grateful for their encouragement, advice, and time. I am sincerely thankful for Vika Filimoeatu's enthusiasm and reassurance throughout my Honors experience.

Dr. Pablo Riboldi—adviser, teacher, mentor, friend, archive companion, and husband—inspired me to soar to new heights and believed in me every step of the way. I hope that this work will please Jacinta and José Victorio, to whom it is dedicated.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prologue</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Consecrated Ground</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going Straight to Heaven</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death Does Not Make Us All Equal</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vineyards, a Blessing and a Curse</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saved from Hell</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Road, Only The Sea</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosario</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strange Burials</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Carriage of Little Angels</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Sources</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Sources</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: A collage of images from Pablo Montaña's journal pages, "Biografía de la familia" showing entry samples and common phrases throughout its pages........ 2

Figure 2: Map of Spain showing a red dot for the location of Cañizo......................... 3

Figure 3: Maternal Grandparents of Pablo Montaña ...................................................... 4

Figure 4: Map of Cañizo. ............................................................................................... 5

Figure 5: Cañizo cemetery showing the old section where Bartolomé Carnero Alonso was buried. No grave marker for him could be found ........................................ 10

Figure 6: Paternal Grandparents of Pablo Montaña.................................................. 12

Figure 7: Children's Section of the Cañizo Cemetery.................................................. 15

Figure 8: Map of Villárdiga. ......................................................................................... 16

Figure 9: San Juan Alonso Family Sepulcher in the San Martín de Valderaduey Cemetery. ......................................................................................... 18

Figure 10: Maternal Grandparents of Exuperancia Fernandez San Juan.................... 19

Figure 11: Map from Cañizo to Villárdiga. Notice the original walking road to the east of the Valderaduey River. ................................................................. 23

Figure 12: Altar and Retablo in Santa María del Realengo, Villárdiga......................... 26

Figure 13: First-born son and daughter of Pablo and Exuperancia, born in Spain........ 28

Figure 14: Baptismal font. .......................................................................................... 30

Figure 15: A typical late 18th to early 19th Century Steamship traveling from Spain to Argentina................................................................. 32

Figure 16: Growth of the Argentine railways, 1870-1910......................................... 36

Figure 17: Map of Argentina showing Buenos Aires (larger red dot) and Rosario (smaller red dot). ................................................................. 37

Figure 18: Crowded streets of downtown Rosario (Plaza Montenegro) in 1903. ....... 38

Figure 19: Detail of the 1909 Municipal map of Rosario showing the first home where Pablo and Exuperancia lived on General Lopez 2480 (green dot) and the public
hospital, Asistencia Pública (red dot). The cemetery, Cementerio de la Piedad, is outlined in blue. ................................................................. 39

Figure 20: Asistencia Publica, constructed in 1902. The hospital in Rosario where Jacinta and José Victorio died............................................................... 41

Figure 21: A street vendor selling milk in Argentina at the beginning of the twentieth century................................................................. 43

Figure 22: First five children born to Pablo and Exuperancia. Within five years of living in Rosario Argentina four of the five children died................................. 45

Figure 23: A chart showing all the children born to Pablo and Exuperancia. ................. 48
PROLOGUE

This story began as a study of eleven loose journal pages by Pablo Montaña in the early twentieth century entitled *Biographia de Familia*. The pages were torn out of a notebook that has long since disappeared. Pablo’s youngest living daughter, my husband’s grandmother “Coca,” inherited these pages. Then, Coca’s youngest daughter, Tía Graciela, inherited them when Coca died, which is how I received a digital copy. These pages are one of a few living memories of Pablo’s life, along with a few precious photos, Argentina Identification cards, a stamped certificate of Argentine national identity from the Consulate of Spain in Argentina, and one baptism record of Pablo’s daughter, Josefa (born in 1919 in Bilboa, Spain).

Pablo Montaña was born in 1881 in Cañizo, Spain, a small town (population just under 1000 in the early 1900s) in Northwestern Spain, in an agricultural area called *Los Campos* (see Figure 2). He migrated with his wife and two children in 1908 to Argentina. The entries of the journal pages began a few months after their arrival and ended in 1935, eleven years before Pablo’s untimely death. Sometime in Pablo’s early years, family lore states that he was a scribe to Spain’s King Alfonso XIII. Each year, every town needed to produce and submit a written history, statistical reports, specific dates and times of events, and other important information describing their village. Pablo was said to have worked in this capacity for his hometown, Cañizo. If this is true, these journal pages reflect his experience working as a scribe. The calligraphic handwriting in the family biography provides four generations of birth, marriage, and death information as if he copied directly from church and civil records. But between the drumbeat of names, places, dates, and events, a discerning eye can catch a glimpse of Pablo’s personal touch, especially in the death entries of his children.

Pablo and his wife, Exuperancia had twelve children, and five died in infancy, one died before reaching the age of twelve, and all six died in Argentina. The remaining six children lived to adulthood. It’s these death entries that caught my attention. Phrases and ideas like “subio [sic] al
Cielo” (went up to heaven), burial customs, and “cause of death” made me wonder about death rituals and doctrine, cemeteries and burials, diseases, and healthcare (see Figure 1). Like many families during this time throughout Europe and America, throughout Pablo and Exuperancia’s lifetime, over and over again, they would experience death. Many deaths were tragic and shocking, as in infants, some were natural and slow, like grandparents. So, I set to work, trying to recapture some of these experiences.

Figure 1: A collage of images from Pablo Montaña’s journal pages, "Biografía de la familia" showing entry samples and common phrases throughout its pages.

With the help of notarial documents and vital records found in the archives of Spain, I pieced together this family and the surroundings from which they lived. My husband and daughter assisted in the archives, and we discovered land sales, wills, and mortgage payment agreements in the Archivo Histórico Provincial de Zamora. We found birth, marriage, and death records in the Archivo Histórico Diocesano de Zamora and the local town archives Ayuntamiento de Cañizo and Archivo de Parroquia de San Pelayo. We visited the towns where Pablo and Exuperancia were born, Cañizo and Villardiga, and walked the streets down to their cemeteries. We attended mass in
the local parish church of San Pelayo. I interviewed the grandchildren of Pablo and Exuperancia in Argentina and studied maps. Then little by little, a story came into view.

This story is not just about attitudes of death in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Catholic Spain and Argentina, but about a family deeply affected by death, especially infant deaths. Then amidst these deaths, it is a story about migration and venturing into the unknown; it is about vulnerability. It tells about the tensions between the Catholic Church and the Liberal Government of Spain. While millions of Spaniards migrated to Argentina during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there are very few, if any, microhistories that describe the experience of an ordinary migrant Spanish family. And this is what I will attempt to do.

Figure 2: Map of Spain showing a red dot for the location of Cañizo.
The village of Cañizo, Reino de Castilla y León, Tierra de Campos, December 1891, Winter. A somber and cold procession left the San Pelayo church and marched slowly northwest toward the cemetery on the outskirts of town. Along the way, mourners passed by ancient bodega ruins where the dirt mounds and underground wine cellars remained amazingly intact and the vineyards that fed the bodegas were sleeping their seasonal hibernation. Like most of the villages in Tierra de Campos, Cañizo was an agricultural town situated along the Valderaduey River. Despite the cold and wind, the fields surrounding the vineyards were green with the tender sprouts of winter wheat planted just two months before. Fifteen minutes after leaving the church, the procession arrived at the cemetery, where they would witness the burial of Bartolomé Carnero Alonso.1 He would likely be buried in the same sepulcher as his wife, Isabel, who died over a decade before (see Figure 4).2

---

1 Bartolomé Carnero Alonso, 28 Diciembre 1891, Ayuntamiento de Cañizo, Villalpando, Zamora, Spain; Seccion de Defunciones, no. 43, folio 43.
2 Isabel Gonzalez Raposo, 24 Febrero 1878, Ayuntamiento de Cañizo, Villalpando, Zamora, Spain; Seccion de Defunciones, no. 24, folio 19-20.
The priest, Cristóbal Palao,\(^3\) clad with his vestments, led the procession through the gates into the cemetery, followed by Bartolomé and Isabel's four children, Angela, Gabriel, Atilano, and Antonina. Angela was married to José Banera Martín and likely had several children, Gabriel served in the military, and Atilano was probably married.\(^4\) The youngest of the four, Antonina, was thirty-five years old,\(^5\) married to Victorio Montaña,\(^6\)

\(^3\) Eduardo F. Martín González, "Cañizo en Los Tiempos del Cólera," *La Miaja--Un Recorrido por Cañizo* (Agosto 2019), N\(^o\) 3, pp. 5-8. Cristóbal Palao was the parish priest in Cañizo who consecrated the new cemetery in Cañizo after its completion on 18 September 1885. Even though it is unknown whether this priest was the same one who served the parish in 1893 when Bartolomé died, priests tended to serve for decades and were called for life, which is also verified by several baptism and marriage records during this time.

\(^4\) Ibid.


and had one son, Pablo (see Figure 3). As the Priest read from the Bible and the small congregation of family, friends, and neighbors chanted hymns, ten-year-old Pablo looked at the humble casket that held his grandfather's body, who died poor without a will.

Pablo would miss his grandfather Bartolomé because he was the only grandparent he ever knew. His paternal grandparents and grandmother Isabel had all died before he was born. His sixty-eight-year-old grandfather had been sick for some time; coughing fits and wheezing made it hard for him to breathe. One day ago, Pablo's mother had taken him to his grandfather's home because his grandfather was dying. He had dressed in church attire and had walked to his grandfather's house. Respectfully he had entered his bedroom. The Priest was administering his grandfather's last rites. His mother, aunt, and uncles were praying and giving alms at the bedside. Tearfully, Pablo had touched his grandfather's wrinkled callused hand, a hand that revealed a lifetime of hard work in the fields. Both his grandfather and father were field laborers, jornaleros. They worked the land that the labradores owned. Labradores were husbandmen, farmers who owned land and a plow team, whether wealthy or not. Jornaleros were day laborers from a lower social class who hired for one or more labradores and did not own animals for plowing.

---

8 Bartolomé Carnero Alonso, 28 Diciembre 1891, "Sección de Defunciones."
10 Bartolomé Carnero Alonso, 28 Diciembre 1891, "Sección de Defunciones."
Sometimes young Pablo had worked alongside them in the field. But this was not what he wanted to be when he grew up; he wanted to go to the seminary and study to become a Priest.¹³

When Pablo had watched the Priest giving the last rites the day before, he realized the time of his grandfather's passing must have been close. The Priest had started administering the sacrament of extremaunción (extreme unction), the final prayer and blessing, and had anointed his grandfather with oil. Then, moments later, he had tearfully watched his grandfather take his last breath. Quiet sobs could be heard throughout the room. After some time, his mother had motioned to him, and he knew it was time for him to go home. She and tía (aunt) Angela would stay and dress his grandfather in preparation for his burial the next day.¹⁴

Death sometimes comes suddenly, the bell rings, and the young tree falls in one big swipe; it's harsh and cold. But other times, like Pablo's grandfather, it comes gradually, one small chip at a time throughout a person's life.

For Catholics, praying, giving alms, administering the sacraments of last rites and extreme unction, and even creating a will, were needed to prepare a person for impending death and for the hereafter. Then burying the deceased in a consecrated ground as the final resting place provided a dwelling where the family could memorialize their deceased

---

¹³ Personal communication by telephone with the granddaughter of Pablo Montaña, 2022.
loved ones and ceremoniously pray for their release from purgatory on certain times throughout the year.\textsuperscript{15}

The peaceful procession to the cemetery that day in 1891 masked a bitter conflict between the church and state that had been a source of much contention during nineteenth-century Spain when civil and ecclesiastical relations were strained. While Spain's colonies in America were defeating Spain for their independence, Spain was having civil wars throughout its borders, caused by liberal insurrections against the established monarchy and church, and local riots in support of either side. Throughout the nineteenth-century, Spain alternated between the monarchy and the liberal constitutional governments. Each shift in power and its quid pro quo agreements transformed agricultural Spain and the Catholic Church's control over its properties. Starting in the 1830s and during the ensuing decades, the liberal governments established several decrees that resulted in the expropriation and privatization of the Church’s vast land holdings and monastic properties. \textit{La desamortización}, ecclesiastical confiscation, affected many aspects of life, including every Spaniards’ final resting place.

Conflicts over secularizing the cemeteries ensued and found their way into the courts. The Church claimed that cemeteries were ecclesiastical properties, meaning that a parish priest could decide who could or could not be buried on consecrated ground. The Church could deny internment to "public sinners... those who refused extreme unction, or had renounced Catholicism, or were Protestants or freethinkers." Public sinners were buried outside the cemetery walls on unkempt grounds and suffered public disgrace. In a small town or village, like Cañizo, if someone was buried somewhere other than the town

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
cemetery, it reflected badly on the honor and reputation of the family and judged by the local priest as having died "outside the bosom of the Church." This would become significant later on in Pablo's life when some years later, in another country he would suffer dishonor, grief, and anxiety of two scandalous burials of his children with the risk of them dying outside the bosom of the Church in a public cemetery.

Campaigns proposing to build public cemeteries managed by local municipalities intensified during the second half of the nineteenth-century spawned by the resurgence of cholera outbreaks. As a necessary measure against epidemics, cemeteries were moved away from inhabited areas by the Royal Decree of 1787. This decree mandated that all the deceased be buried in cemeteries, irrespective of the cause of death. Municipal funds would be used to construct cemeteries while the church continued its custodial responsibility over them. However, this decree was carried out slowly. Cañizo had to wait until 1885, almost a century after the decree, until the city council finally built a new cemetery for their town. This cemetery was blessed by the parish priest Cristóbal Palao on September 18, 1885, with the assistance of the mayor Juan Olea Manjón, the alderman Ventura González and the doctors Francisco Orduña and Genaro Álvarez.

At this newly built cemetery, Pablo watched the wooden casket being lowered into the hallowed ground, and he and his family took comfort knowing that Barolomé was headed to purgatory (see Figure 5).

---

Figure 5: Cañizo cemetery showing the old section where Bartolomé Carnero Alonso was buried. No grave marker for him could be found.
GOING STRAIGHT TO HEAVEN

In Catholic theology, there are three or four possible places where a baptized Christian can go after death. Heaven is the inheritance only for the pure, holy, and virtuous, and they can enter heaven immediately after death. Hell is where those who were unrepentant or died in sin go. Like Bartolomé, Pablo's grandfather, all those who have had their last rites given and have confessed their sins before death go to Purgatory, which is a holding place for the righteous who still need to be purified before entering heaven. Unbaptized infants and children reside in Limbo. At birth, baptism is an essential and required sacrament for salvation because it cleanses the child of humankind's first parent's (Adam and Eve) original sin or guilt.¹⁹

Children are innocent until they reach the age of accountability and receive their first communion. Baptized babies are innocent, and as such, they go straight to heaven. The baptized baby's funeral was different from that of adult Catholics; it was considered a celebration. A local Cañizera explained it this way: “Children's funerals were a source of sadness and joy at the same time. Because the belief of our land, of our families, knew that they were going straight to heaven, because they were baptized... So it was. It was not called funeral but a Gloria Mass.”²⁰

The deceased baby was considered "an inocente, a 'blameless creature' who died unregretted and as such, his or her future happiness was assured." The baby was considered an angel who immediately went to heaven at death.\(^{21}\)

Figure 6: Paternal Grandparents of Pablo Montaña

The village of Cañizo, Summer of 1893. While Pablo was preparing to go to seminary school in the fall, the Montaña family would experience another death, but this time a young infant named Josefita, Pablo's cousin. Josefita was the daughter of his uncle, Sabas Montaña, his father's brother, and Ynes Raposo Pasqual (see Figure 6).\(^{22}\) Sabas was a labrador\(^{23}\) and owned a bakery on Calle Nueva, where they likely lived as well (see Figure 4).\(^{24}\)

Pablo had been preparing all summer long to start his schooling at the Seminario Menor de San Atiliano de Zamora in the fall, which was about 40 km southwest of Cañizo.\(^{25}\) He had never been away from home that far; he would miss the familiar

---


\(^{22}\) Josefa Montaña Raposo, "Defunciones 1890-1894," *Ayuntamiento de Cañizo,* Villalpando, Zamora, Spain; Seccion de Defunciones, Libro 7, No. 44, Folio 77.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.


closeness of his village where everyone knew each other. He would be moving to the large city of Zamora with some trepidation but also enthusiasm. Then in July, his mother told him that his baby cousin, Josefita, died of dysentery, a common but painful disease that caused a high fever, nausea, vomiting, and bloody mucus-filled diarrhea.

Infant deaths, like Josefita's, were common in the nineteenth century, even into the early twentieth century, especially infants who died from infections that caused vomiting and diarrhea, called summer diarrhea.26 Josefita had likely just been weened since typically babies were nursed for about twelve to eighteen months old. Breastfeeding was encouraged for the health of the child and if something went wrong with the mother's milk, the family hired a wetnurse. However, breastfeeding and weaning were key factors to summer diarrhea. Infant death rates increased once a baby was weaned or when the mother started supplementing her nursing with other foods. If the mother supplemented food, she would often start with gachas (porridge), migas (breadcrumbs), or later on as the baby grew puches, a mixture of toasted flour, olive oil, water, honey, or sugar. Often these meals were prepared with unboiled water, and general hygiene was lacking (introducing bacteria into the baby's food).27

Frequently these feeding practices would lead to gastrointestinal problems during the summer months. Children were especially vulnerable after weaning at twelve to eighteen months old. Like Josefita, babies with gastrointestinal infections died from severe dehydration. Summer diarrhea mostly occurred in the lowlands and hot areas of Spain

---

where water was more stagnant, like in the town of Cañizo. In the high sierras of Spain, for example, summer diarrhea was almost nonexistent.\textsuperscript{28} For tía Ynes it must have been very stressful and worrisome caring for Josefita, especially when the baby could not keep anything down.

Pablo arrived late Sunday morning, and as he entered his uncle's home, he saw his mother, his tía Eleuteria, and Josefita's mother, tía Ynes. They carefully dressed the baby, lying in a small open basket painted white. A garland of wildflowers surrounded the baby's ribboned bonnet, and her fingers were interlaced upon her chest; she was dressed in a simple white blouse. The angel baby, Josefita, was now ready for the *velatorio del angel* (angel wake).\textsuperscript{29} The family carefully carried the opened basket to the church, turning left from *Calle Nueva*, down *Calle Real*, four blocks to San Pelayo on the left side of the street.

In the *Parroquia de San Pelayo*, the parish where Pablo had been baptized just twelve years earlier, Josefita was carried to the altar, adorned with white taper candles and wildflowers. The ceremony was simple, recited prayers and scriptures read by the Priest, and then the congregation chanted together the Gloria Mass.

Josefita's basket was then covered, and the church bells rang cheerfully, announcing the baby's death and ascension into heaven. Pablo and several other children carried the basket to the cemetery for burial. As they came into the cemetery gates, immediately to the left was an area reserved for infant burials, a small hole already dug for Josefita's resting place. Pablo and the children who carried Josefita to the cemetery were

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, pp. 141-145.
\textsuperscript{29} Antonius Robben, *Death, Mourning, and Burial-A Cross-Cultural Reader*, p. 169-174.
given small tips of candy, donuts, or money. Later, a simple cast-iron cross painted white would mark the resting place of Josefita with a plaque bearing the inscription, "Here lies the girl, Josefita Montaña, died the 15th of July 1893, at 16 months of age, remembered by her parents, R.I.P" (see Figure 7). While Pablo was going through his own mourning, not many miles away, his future wife was facing her own grief.

![Figure 7 Children's Section of the Cañizo Cemetery.](image)

30 Personal conversation with author, on October 31, 2021.
31 The actual grave marker of Josefa could not be found in the Cañizo cemetery. A local Cañizera explained that when a child dies, the remains of the previous burial are moved to the side to make room for the burial of the new infant. The author used another grave marker to visualize the inscription of Josefita's.
DEATH DOES NOT MAKE US ALL EQUAL

The village of Villárdiga, Reino de Castilla y León, Tierra de Campos, 1893. In the same year that Josefa died, seven kilometers north of Cañizo, Felipe San Juan Alonso lay sick in bed preparing his will. It was six in the evening on the 14th of January. Felipe San Juan Alonso was sixty-two years old, and his wife, Antonia Alonso Chimeno, sat in an upholstered wooden chair by his bedstead. The notary from Villalpando, Pedro Burón, had been summoned and was ready to draw the documents. The three witnesses to the will sat in chairs at the foot of the bed. Because of Felipe's ailment, Diego Alonso, one of the
witnesses, would sign in his stead.\textsuperscript{32} Felipe was a wealthy landowner, a \textit{labrador}, and a tobacco craftsman and distributor. He and his predecessors had lived in Villárdiga for generations and owned various properties, corrals, and large parcels of rich land surrounding the village.\textsuperscript{33}

In the decades when the Catholic church was forced to sell its property during the \textit{desamortización},\textsuperscript{34} it was likely that the San Juan family bought several properties in and around Villárdiga at that time; property that Felipe would want to pass down to his three children. But he was drafting his will not only to distribute his property, but also to proclaim his faith, "a penitential act" to prepare his soul for his imminent death. Felipe's will, then, became the only written confirmation of his death "rehearsal."\textsuperscript{35} The notary read aloud the words to everyone in the room,

\begin{quote}
I the Notary attest and say: that invoking the Holy Name of God himself in persons and in his presence and confessing to being an Apostolic Roman Catholic...First, he entrusts his soul to God. He took it out of nothing, and the body to the earth was formed and made a corpse to be buried in the Catholic cemetery.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

The will was another death ritual, aside from funerary and burial practices, that settled one's affairs not only with man, but with God.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{32} Pedro, Burón, escribano, “España, Provincia de Zamora, Protocolos notariales, 1893.” \textit{Archivo Histórico Provincial de Zamora}, Testamento de Felipe San Juan Alonso, Villárdiga, Signatura 12451, folio 11-12v, No. 4, 14 Ene 1893.
\textsuperscript{33} Manuel Salas Fernández, notario, "España, Provincia de Zamora, Protocolos notariales, 1905." \textit{Archivo Histórico Provincial de Zamora}, Venta Ildefonso Fernandez a Iluminado San Juan, Villárdiga, Signatura 14186, folio 975-976v, No. 207, 29 Noviembre 1905.
\textsuperscript{34} William J. Callahan, \textit{The Catholic Church In Spain, 1875-1998}, p. 2-4.
\textsuperscript{35} Carlos M.N. Eire, \textit{From Madrid to Purgatory}, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{36} Burón, Pedro, escribano, “España, Provincia de Zamora, Protocolos notariales, 1893.” \textit{Archivo Histórico Provincial de Zamora}, Testamento de Felipe San Juan Alonso, Villárdiga, Signatura 12451, folio 11-12v, No. 4, 14 Ene 1893.
\end{flushright}
Several days later, Felipe San Juan would be buried in the San Martin de Valderaduey cemetery, in the San Juan Alonso family sepulcher. As requested by his will, his wife, Antonia, arranged the burial and funeral services and he was buried according to "his class and parish status." The sizeable ornate granite tombstone showed the wealth and social status of the San Juan Alonso family (see Figure 9). As cemeteries were built throughout the villages of Spain, cemeteries were not only perceived as a "garden of melancholy" and a "bittersweet place" to remember loved ones, but they also became a display of one's wealth, "vanities and fantasies in stone."  

Figure 9: San Juan Alonso Family Sepulcher in the San Martín de Valderaduey Cemetery.

37 Exact death date unknown. Estimated from the marriage record of Pablo and Exuperancia, 16 Nov 1904, Felipe San Juan was deceased and the information from Felipe San Juan's will.
38 Pedro Burón, notario, Testamento de Felipe San Juan Alonso, Villárdiga, 14 Ene 1893.
Later, after his death, the entire family was sitting in the formal dining room of the San Juan's large home. Next to Sandalia was her ten-year-old daughter, Exuperancia. Her mother, Antonia, was sitting at the other side of the large wooden table. Sitting next to Antonia was her younger sister Arsenia and younger brother Iluminado (see Figure 10). Pedro Burón, the Notary, was seated at the head of the table reading the will of her recently deceased father.

Sandalia looked around the familiar room, the tile floors, the rich wood furniture, the crystal glasses, china plates, teapots, and silverware displayed in the glass case against the wall. Then on the other side of the room, there was the buffet table with a large mirror. On the buffet mantle were two large silver candlesticks, one on each side, holding yellow tapered candles. The window in the corner brought light to the buffet table and two painted portraits on the wall: one portrait of her father on the right side of the buffet and the other portrait of her mother on the left. They were younger, about the same age Sandalia was now.
Sandalia was born in this home thirty-two years ago in the master bedroom down the hall.\(^{40}\) The rooms on the main floor surrounded and faced a beautifully sunlit outdoor patio lined with clay pots and exotic plants and flowers. The stucco walls of the patio were painted a bright mustard yellow. This home had been passed down for generations and was over two hundred years old with the original thatched roof and ceramic tiles. Her childhood room was upstairs, unchanged, everything in its place as it was when she was a child.

Her dollhouse was full of tiny furniture, kitchen cabinets, and dishes. Then to the right of the dollhouse, was her life-size porcelain baby dolls laying in the rocking cribs. There was a large wooden armoire holding her heirloom clothes and shoes in the corner: her lacy baptism dress and bonnet she wore when she was a baby, and her communion dress when she was about Exuperancia's age.\(^{41}\) As her thoughts made it back to the room, Pedro Burón was reading now the distribution of her father's property.

"He declares to be married in the first nunciō of whose marriage currently has three children named Sandalia, Arsenia, and Iluminado San Juan Alonso having his legitimate wife Antonia Alonso Chimeno with whom he legally lives...Sends and bequeaths to his son Iluminado San Juan Alonso the following two rustic estates..."\(^{42}\)

Even though Iluminado was the youngest of the three, he would inherit the main estate. Felipe's preference for the youngest son is unusual, but not uncommon. Typically, the eldest son or daughter received the main inheritance. However, in this region of Spain, Castille, the testator could choose any heir they preferred for a particular portion of a testator's property.\(^{43}\) Sandalia would have been the logical and natural choice to receive

\(^{40}\) Sandalia San Juan Alonso, 3 Septiembre 1861, "Libro de bautizados en la Parroquia de Santa María de Realejo de Villárdiga," Archivo Histórico Diocesano de Zamora, Zamora, Spain; vol. 248-4, p. 74v.

\(^{41}\) This description of the house, furnishings, toys, and dresses is based on the author's visit to a typical labrador's family home in Cañizo and the actual San Juan home in Villárdiga.

\(^{42}\) Pedro Burón, notario, Testamento de Felipe San Juan Alonso, Villárdiga, 14 Ene 1893.

\(^{43}\) David S. Reher, Perspectives on the Family in Spain Past and Present, p. 49-50.
the main inheritance since she was the eldest and could have cared for her widowed mother (a moral requirement of the main heir). This little detail implies some unknown tension within the San Juan family dynamics. Could it be that Sandalia's illegitimate pregnancy had disgraced the family causing Felipe's injured pride to bequeath his estate to his son, Iluminado? Pedro Burón continued...

Send and bequeath to his granddaughter Exuperancia Fernández San Juan fifteen pesetas in metalica ... and the remainder of his assets, rights, and actions, he names and institutes as his sole and universal heirs to the expressed three children Sandalia, Arsenia, and Iluminado...that they may have them in equal parts and inherit with his and God's blessing.

Interestingly, Iluminado was going to inherit the main properties of the estate and another equal portion.

Inheritance practices differed by region in Spain, giving the testator different degrees of freedom to bequeath her property. In Castille, the inheritance was divided into thirds. The testator could freely will one-third of her estate, or main estate, to any preferred heir, no matter the gender, relation, or family position. The second third, called the legítima, had to be equally distributed among each of the testator’s legitimate descendants, or mandatory heirs (surviving children, if no surviving children, then grandchildren, etc.). The last third of the estate, called the legítima mejora, could be unequally bequeathed to one or more mandatory heirs.

In Felipe's will, it seems that Iluminado received the first one-third (the main house, one of the two "rustic" estates), the equal share of the legítima (the "remaining"

44 Exuperancia Fernandez San Juan, 28 Abril 1883, "Libro de bautizados en la Parroquia de Santa María de Realengo de Villárdiga," Archivo Histórico Diocesano de Zamora, Villárdiga, Villalpando, Zamora, Spain, Vol. 248-5, Libro 7, Folio 87. The marginal note in Exuperacia's baptismal record states that Ildefonso and Sandalia were married five months after Exuperancia's baptism.
45 Ibid.
equal shares), and the mejora, (the second of the two "rustic" estates)—almost seven-ninths of the patrimony. In contrast, the granddaughter’s portion, Exuperancia's fifteen pesetas in gold coins, either came from her mother, Sandalia's equal share, or the mejora. Even though the value of fifteen pesetas was likely not a large sum, the gold coins could increase in value over time, something that Sandalia would hope for to add to the comfort and well-being of her only child.

So, when Exuperancia heard her name, she looked at her mother; Sandalia resolutely nodded. Oh, how her father loved Exuperancia, his only grandchild. She knew that Exuperancia would miss him terribly. But Sandalia was content when she thought about Exuperancia's future. Even though her daughter's life started with a minor scandal and village gossip because Sandalia was pregnant before she married Ildefonso, the past would not change her daughter's bright future.\footnote{Ildefonso Fernández Ramos y Sandalia San Juan, 20 Octubre 1883.} It would be full of prosperity and fulfillment. Sandalia's inheritance from her father, and her marriage to Ildefonso, would assure Exuperancia's prosperous future. But life has a way of becoming unpredictable and unwieldy. And when Exuperancia matured, she would choose love over wealth and security, risking the possibility of not receiving her inheritance.
Figure 11: Map from Cañizo to Villárdiga. Notice the original walking road to the east of the Valderaduey River.
VINEYARDS: A BLESSING AND A CURSE

The Villages of Villárdiga and Cañizo, 1904. The first time Pablo and Exuperancia met was while both were walking on a path between towns in the fields, and it was love at first sight. Exuperancia was walking in one direction and Pablo was walking with the local priest in the other direction (see Figure 11).\(^4\) Pablo and the priest were likely going to give mass in the neighboring towns.

Sometime after they met and fell in love, Pablo decided to leave his seminary training, follow his love-struck heart, and ask for Exuperancia's hand in marriage. When Pablo asked for her hand, he met with some heated opposition from her parents, Ildefonso and Sandalia. A power struggle ensued. Exuperancia might have threatened to elope with Pablo. Her parents then warned her that they would take away her inheritance if she did. Pablo was from a lower social class than the Fernández and San Juan families, and Exuperancia's parents did not want their only child to marry beneath her status.\(^5\)

However, sometime after this parental pressure, they must have accepted the engagement because when the banns, *canonicas moniciones*, were posted in Cañizo and Villárdiga to announce their engagement for the required three days, there were no impediments.\(^6\) Having no impediments to the marriage meant that no family member,

---

\(^4\) Personal interview with Graciela Amiel. Her grandmother, Exuperancia, told her the story of how they met, 2022.

\(^5\) The family story is that Pablo and Exuperancia eloped, however, with the evidence of the marriage documentas explained, the elopement was probably just a threat. For a discussion on family honor and parents' indifference to inequal marriages in Argentina, stemming from Spanish laws and customs, see Jeffrey M. Shumway's book, *The Case of the Ugly Suitor*, University of Nebraska Press, 2005, pp. 25-26.

friend, or neighbor, came forward to bring a canonical complaint or reason to the Priest why the couple should not be married.51 So, on the sixth of November 1904, the Priest of Cañizo certified that they were "examined and approved in Christian Doctrine" and "they confessed and received communion receiving the nuptial blessings" of marriage. Ten days later, on the sixteenth, Pablo and Exuperancia were officially married, *el matrimonio canónico*, before the face of the church, *facie ecclesiae*, in her hometown Villárdiga, in the parish of *Santa Maria de Realengo* (see Figure 12). Pablo was twenty-three years old, Exuperancia was twenty-one. The godparents of this union were Sabas Montaña (Pablo's uncle) and Arsenia San Juan Alonso (Exuperancia's aunt).52

52 Pablo Montaña Carnero y Exuperancia Fernández San Juan, 16 Noviembre 1904, "Libro de Casados 1875-1955."
Figure 12: Altar and Retablo in Santa María del Realengo, Villárdiga
Why Ildefonso and Sandalia had a change of heart and eventually accepted the marriage of Pablo and Exuperancia is unknown. One possibility is that two months before Pablo and Exuperancia were married, Pablo's aunt, forty-nine-year-old tía Eleuteria Montaña Herrero, wrote up a will in September. Eleuteria was once widowed, married a second time, and childless. She bequeathed to her nephew, Pablo Montaña, the old vineyard of tres cuartas in Cañizo, property that she likely inherited from her first husband. Even though this was not a large amount of property, and Pablo would not receive this inheritance until after her death, this might have helped soften the hearts of Exuperancia's parents.

Having resigned his seminary training to become a priest and newly married, Pablo likely hired himself out as a jornalero, working in the vineyards of Cañizo, his aunt owned. Unbeknownst to him this whole line of work would soon all but disappear from Tierra de Campos. The phylloxera plague destroyed most vineyards throughout Europe and had come to this area of Spain at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{53} By 1904, Cañizo surely felt the economic weight and devastating effects of the epidemic. The pest affected the plants' roots and killed entire vineyards throughout Tierra de Campos, including the vineyards of Cañizo and Villárdiga. The farmers had to make significant economic efforts to uproot the infected plants, till the land, and buy and plant new grafts to combat the disease. The grafts consisted of a new American grapevine species, Vitis Riparia, a species that was said to have been resistant to Phylloxera, and grafted it to their European wine grape species. It would take up to three years to become established and produce the fruit they

needed to make wine. During this time of economic uncertainty, Pablo and Exuperancia would joyfully welcome to their new home in Villárdiga, their first-born son, José Victorio.

SAVED FROM HELL

The village of Villárdiga, May 1906, Spring. José Victorio was born at eight in the evening on the 6th of May (see Figure 13). A week later, on a Sunday, in her small home on Calle de la Iglesia, Exuperancia watched as her mother and aunt, tía Arsenia (José Victorio's godmother) stood by the bedside changing José Victorio into his white baptismal clothes. Exuperancia's father, Ildefonso Fernández, owned four farms in Villárdiga: A house on Calle Plazuela, a corral with a cabin on the corner of Calle Puente and the alleyway of Calle Real across from the church, a small room on Calle de la

---

54 Personal email correspondence with author, on November 17, 2021, author's name withheld. Translation by Heidi Riboldi.
Iglesia, and a cortina consisting of seven areas (see Figure 8).\textsuperscript{56} Pablo and Exuperancia probably rented the small room on Calle de la Iglesia. Exuperancia would stay in bed for several weeks and would not be expected to attend the baptism of her first child. Adjusting to a new baby, feedings, and nighttime schedules had left her exhausted and she was relieved that her mother and aunt were there to help prepare her newborn son for this momentous day.\textsuperscript{57}

As family members, friends, and neighbors, walked across the street into the parish church of Santa María de Realengo, the baptismal font was at the back of the church, to the left of the doors. The Priest, Don Gregorio Luengo, and the deacon, who would assist in the baptism, were already there waiting. Beside the deacon, on a small table, was a cauldron with olive oil, Los Santos óleos, oil that he would later use in the ceremony. José Victorio was then dressed in a small white garment, symbolizing the garment that Jesus wore in the tomb after his death and representing the promise of the Resurrection. This child would one day die, like Christ did, but would also be resurrected, as Christ was. Pablo held the baby close to the font, and Father Luengo asked, “What name do you give your child?” Pablo and the godparents together responded, “José Victorio.”\textsuperscript{58}

The Cura continued, “What do you ask of God’s Church for your child?”, again they responded, “Baptism.” Then Father Luengo asked if they were willing to bring the child up in the Christian faith. Each of them nodded in the affirmative. The deacon blessed the font water by gesturing the figure of a cross, while the Priest asked several questions

\textsuperscript{56} Manuel Salas Fernández, Venta Ildefonso Fernández a Iluminado San Juan, 1905.
\textsuperscript{57} Personal email correspondence with author about mother’s postpartum expectations and nursing, 8 December 2021, author’s name withheld. Translation by Heidi Riboldi.
of faith and commitment to the godparents on behalf of the child. Because the child could not answer for himself, the godparents were expected to answer for him vicariously until the child reached the age of accountability. Then the family gathered around to witness the baptism of the child. Pablo placed José Victorio face upward over the font. The Cura Luengo poured water over the head of the child, three times while saying, “The servant of God, José Victorio, is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The water was cold, and José Victorio was startled and started to cry. The deacon then anointed José Victorio’s head with chrism oil, signifying that the child was now a Christian. “The word Christ means anointed, and a Christian is someone who’s anointed in Jesus Christ.” Finally, Father Luengo pronounced a blessing upon the parents and family, the baptism was recorded, and the family returned home to celebrate together (see Figure 14).  

---

Later in the evening, when the baby was sound asleep, and the small room was quiet, Exuperancia tenderly smiled as she folded the baby’s white baptism gown and gently placed it in the wooden chest at the foot of their bed. Her eyes swept the room and rested on the rosary draping over the figure of Jesus on the cross. His pain, suffering, death, and resurrection penetrated the symbolic meaning of her baptized child; she felt comforted knowing that her child was saved from hell, no matter what happened in the coming years. If she followed the practice of other women in Spain, she would have reached out to touch one of the rosary beads and said a prayer for her son, which ended by gesturing the figure of the cross.

The future was uncertain. For the past several years, talk of some families wanting to leave Spain and migrate to Argentina sounded throughout the villages of Los Campos.\textsuperscript{60} Even her husband seemed restless to go. But for a moment, she sat in the stillness of Christ’s offering of peace.

**Figure 15:** A typical late 18th to early 19th Century Steamship traveling from Spain to Argentina.\(^{61}\)

---

**NO ROAD, ONLY THE SEA**

*Traveler, your footprints are the only road, nothing else.*

*Traveler, there is no road; you make your own path as you walk.*

*As you walk, you make your own road, and when you look back you see the path you will never travel again.*

*Traveler, there is no road; only a ship's wake on the sea.*

---

Caminante, son tus huellas el camino, y nada más; caminante, no hay camino: se hace camino al andar.

Al andar se hace camino, y al volver la vista atrás se ve la senda que nunca se ha de volver a pisar.

Caminante, no hay camino, sino estelas en la mar.

---

_Villárdiga, Cañizo, and Vigo, 1908._ By the time José Victorio celebrated his second birthday in 1908, Pablo and Exuperancia were making their final plans to emigrate to

---


Argentina. Pablo had been saving every peseta he could to buy passage tickets by steamboat. Typically, a person needed to work 195 days to earn one passage ticket from Spain to Argentina. Pablo had to save for over a year for his growing family. He likely worked at any odd job he could find, working in the vineyards, the fields, and possibly even leaving Los Campos and working at the shipyard at one of the ports. Exuperancia was expecting their second child, and they planned to leave soon after the baby was born. Pablo and Exuperancia and their parents would join the three million emigrants who left Spain during the early twentieth century, most of whom chose to seek their luck and good fortunes in Argentina.

Pablo and Exuperancia were both only children, so naturally, the parents wanted to be close to their grandchildren. Both sets of grandparents were relatively young, in their late 40's. Ildefonso had been preparing for this move for some time. He sold his property within the limits of Villárdiga to Iluminado San Juan, his wife's brother, selling all four farms for 500 pesetas. Victorio Montaña, Pablo's father, sold a small urban farm that he had inherited from his father Enrique Montaña, located on Calle Nueva, next to the bakery that his brother Sabas owned. He sold it for 300 pesetas. Sometime after Exuperancia gave birth to their second child, a girl they named Jacinta, they started on their voyage to Argentina (see Figure 15).

---

64 Ibid, p. 730.
65 Manuel Salas Fernández, notario, Venta de Ildefonso Fernández, 1905.
66 Manuel Salas Fernández, notario, Venta de Victorio Montaña, 1908.
Saying good-bye to Los Campos and the villages of Villárdiga and Cañizo must have been difficult. Pablo might have remembered the uneasy but eager emotions he felt leaving Cañizo for the first time when he was twelve years old, going to the seminary in Zamora. But Zamora was seven times smaller than the growing city of Rosario and now he had a family to care for with very little to support them. What kept them hopeful was the dream for a better life in America, *Hacer la America* was the expression used by many immigrants. The port of departure for emigrants from Los Campos was typically Vigo, over 300 km (200 miles) directly east from Cañizo. The Montaña and San Juan families likely travelled the six-hour trip by railway, on the *Compañía del Ferrocarril* from Zamora to Vigo. Soon after their arrival in Vigo, they likely boarded one of the Hamburg South America line steamships, which took them directly to Rosario, a voyage that lasted nineteen to twenty days.

Aboard the ship, they "enjoyed" the typical Spanish food, "magnificent bunks," and received free medical assistance, support that Exuperancia might have needed on the voyage. With the stress of packing, caring for a newborn and toddler, and moving to another country, Exuperancia might have experienced lactation insufficiency and started supplementing with other foods when she suspected Jacinta was not getting enough milk. As explained earlier, supplementing created severe problems for babies especially on a ship before modern conveniences of refrigeration, pasteurization, and general hygiene.

---

68 Hilario Manuel Rodriguez Ferreiro, "La emigración a América por el Puerto de Vigo de 1900-1904," *Minius, Universidad de Vigo* (1992), pp. 196. The research has not uncovered the port of departure of the Montaña family, the most likely departure ports could have been Bilbao or Vigo.

69 Hilario Manuel Rodriguez Ferreiro, "La emigración a América por el Puerto de Vigo de 1900-1904," p. 198.

Hot water was not always boiled, the canned milk was not refrigerated or pasteurized, the meats were generally "old, tough, and bad smelling," the bread was "soggy" and most of the food was thrown overboard. Each passenger was given a tin dinner set, which they were expected to clean with their own soap and towel. Most passengers did not bring soap, so they rinsed their dishes in cold saltwater. By the time the voyage was over, Jacinta was probably showing signs of summer diarrhea. To make matters worse, when they landed in Rosario, it was summer.

ROSARIO

Rosario lies on the Paraná River and is the second fluvial port of Argentina. The main port city, Buenos Aires, sits on the west shore of Río de la Plata, 200 miles south (see Figure 17). Rosario was a self-made city, created during the mid-nineteenth century, commonly called "the daughter of her own efforts" because it did not have a colonial past. When the British built the railway systems throughout Argentina, Rosario became a hub between the interior provinces and its natural deep-water port (see Figure 16). Before Rosario's port was developed, everything that came in and out of Argentina was expected to go through the port of Buenos Aires, and with that came heavy taxes. The provinces of Argentina

---


united their efforts to defy Buenos Aires' centralization and despotism. During the 1860s civil war era, when the provinces of Argentina fought against and defeated the capital city of Buenos Aires, Rosario offered the interior provinces another option for their exports. By 1907, Rosario had a population of over 150,000 and was exporting more wheat, corn, and linseed than Buenos Aires. Many shipping companies would bring immigrants from Europe directly to Rosario and load goods and cargo on their return trip.74

---


Figure 17: Map of Argentina showing Buenos Aires (larger red dot) and Rosario (smaller red dot).
General Lopez 2480, Rosario Argentina, December 1908, Summer. The arrival of Pablo and Exuperancia in their new homeland was immediately overshadowed by the illness of their infant daughter, Jacinta. The weeks that lay ahead after disembarking in the port of Rosario were filled with worry and stress for Pablo and Exuperancia. They found a place to stay on General Lopez Street in the growing city of Rosario (see Figure 18), but their baby Jacinta was very ill with a high fever, diarrhea, vomiting, and abdominal pain. It was Friday, December 11th, in mid-summer, hot and humid. Pablo walked the few blocks

---

from his home to the public hospital, *la Asistencia Pública*, holding three-month-old Jacinta in his arms (see Figure 19Figure 20). Desperately, Pablo left his crying daughter in the care of Dr. Rabellini.

The next day Pablo wrote the following in his journal.

The child Jacinta Montaña Fernández went up to heaven on the 11th day of December 1908 at three in the afternoon... she was taken to the *Cementerio la Piedad* by the hospital's ambulance, *la Asistencia Pública*, on the 12th. Having just arrived here from Spain, and without knowing the customs, and no one to tell them to us, none of us went, and we don't know which sepulcher she was buried in.\(^7\)

\(^7\) Ibid. p. 14.
Pablo and Exuperancia's only solace was that their baptized child Jacinta "went up to heaven," *subio al cielo.* But they had very little time to grieve as José Victorio was also sick. Because of what happened to their daughter, they were hesitant to take José Victorio to the *Asistencia Pública* (see Figure 20). They tried several doctors to help with their son's condition; his symptoms were high fever, abdominal pain, throwing up, and bloody urine. They first went to Dr. Lapús, at the *Hospital Rosario*, and then to Dr. Quinteros. Finally, they took their son to the *Asistencia Pública*, where he was diagnosed with *ungliterano de nefritis*, inflammation of the kidney, by an unknown doctor. The demand for hospital beds exceeded the number of rooms and services available in the *Asistencia Pública*.

Immigrants flowed into the ports of Argentina during the first decades of the twentieth century, and with that came sickness and death. Dr. Carlos Malbrán, who was the president of the National Department of Hygiene in Argentina, remarked that "shortly after taking this position, I received a letter from a friend from Rosario, Santa Fe, who expressed his surprise at the frequency of seeing carriages passing by on the street carrying corpses to the cemetery." Diseased cadavers were immediately disposed of because they posed a threat to public safety.

---

79 Ibid.
On Sunday, February 14th, 1909, Pablo wrote:

The child, José Victorio Montaña Fernández went up to heaven, on the 13th of February, at 5 in the afternoon, at two years and nine months old... the hospital ambulance took him to the Cementerio la Piedad, and for the same reason as before, we do not know where he is buried.82

Why the hospital neglected to notify Pablo and Exuperancia about delivering the baby's corpses to the cemetery is unimaginable. And why the bodies were disposed of in an unmarked grave is a mystery. It seems harsh and cold, and the records are silent. There were no recorded outbreaks of cholera or any other epidemics in Rosario in the early 1900s. Perhaps the chaos in the hospital with harried workers attempting to treat the dying and the dead at the same time, made it impossible to care for the individual needs of each

---

82 Pablo Montaña, "Biografía de la Familia, datos autenticos," p. 15.
patient's family. Perhaps the reason they were buried in a mass grave was because it was
standard procedure owing to the common occurrence of deaths. Perhaps the frequent
deaths were caused by the rapid demographic changes of the city and poor living
conditions.\(^\text{83}\)

Just as in Spain, stomach and kidney infections, or summer diarrhea, were
common causes of infant deaths. Doctors worldwide were discovering that along with
unsanitary water and hygiene, summer diarrhea also had a "clear relationship to
contaminated milk." Cows were abundant in Argentina and milk was brought from the
suburbs and sold by street vendors who were out all day in the sun (see Figure 21). Over
the next decades, refrigeration and pasteurization would revolutionize the milk industry
and in return, infant mortality quickly fell.\(^\text{84}\)

---

\(^{83}\) Cecilia M. Pascual, "La epidemia de cólera como condensador de sentidos: culturas urbanas, narraciones
clínicas y políticas higiénicas en Rosario, Argentina, 1886-1887," História, Ciências, Saúde--Manguinhos,

https://doi.org/10.1203/01.PDR.0000101756.93542.09; Juan Carlos Veronelli y Magali Veronelli Correch,
Los orígenes institucionales de la Salud Pública en la Argentina, p. 310; Juan Carlos Veronelli y Magali
Veronelli Correch, Los orígenes institucionales de la Salud Pública en la Argentina, Organización
Still, Pablo and Exuperancia were in a new country and now childless. Their Spanish Catholic custom to celebrate a child's death, in theory, was healing and comforting, but in practice, the sorrow and grief they surely felt must have been suffocating. The only people they knew in Rosario were their own family who were also foreigners. Their parents Ildefonso, Sandalia, Victorio and Antonina, were probably a great support during this difficult time. On the day of their children's deaths, there was no wake, no funeral, no cemetery procession, no Gloria mass, no church bells ringing, no prayers given at the cemetery, and no grave marker at the cemetery, marking the memorial where their children were buried. Cañizo must have crossed Pablo's mind, thinking about the parish church of San Pelayo, the fifteen-minute walk to the cemetery, passing the

---

ancient bodegas and the wheat fields, and the area designated for infants to the left after entering the gate. When his cousin Josefita died, she was dressed in white, with wildflowers adorning her head, and placed in a white basket, something his daughter Jacinta would never have. Pablo must have worried that his children might not have been buried on consecrated ground within the bosom of the church. Two years later, Pablo and Exuperancia put to rest their third child and angel baby, Pablo José (1st). 86 He was just over a year old and died from *gastroenteritis*. This time Pablo made sure that his son received a proper funeral and burial. 87 But this was not the end of their troubles, nor the last death in their family.

---

86 Pablo and Exuperancia had two sons named Pablo José, the first born in 1910 and the second born in 1912.
THE CARRIAGE OF LITTLE ANGELS

*General Lopez 2429, Rosario Argentina, May 1914, Autumn.* Exuperancia was in bed holding her recently deceased angel baby, Josefita, in her arms, resting the baby on her large tummy. Pablo and Exuperancia had lived in Rosario for over six years now--six years of hardship. For the past seven months, she and her husband had tenderly cared for Josefita, who became ill when she was five months old. Josefita threw up every drop of milk that she had sucked and could not keep hardly anything down. Exuperancia desperately tried several wet nurses to see if another person's milk would make a difference, but the baby was "not able to take the breast from anyone." Josefita died of starvation.88

Since their marriage, Exuperancia had given birth to five children, and Josefita was the fourth to die (see Figure 22).89 She was due to have her sixth child in a couple of months.90 Her only living child, two-year-old, Pablo José (2nd), struggled with his health since he was born. They had to hurry him to *la Iglesia Santa Rosa* for a quick baptism

---

88 Pablo Montaña, "Biografia de la Familia, datos autenticos," p. 15.
89 Ibid, pp. 8-17.
90 Birth record of Santiago Alfonso and biography
because "he was very sick with Gastro-Enteritis," in the summer of 1913. His godparents were urgently picked from among the priests and nuns who were on hand at the time. Exuperancia worried that he would not live long either. All the deaths of her four children were painfully vivid, but especially the deaths of Jacinta and José Victorio who had no funeral or burial ceremony. At least Josefita would receive a proper Catholic funeral and burial, just like her third child, Pablo José (1st), had with a wake, funeral procession, and ceremony at the burial site.

She looked at her sweet baby Josefita, who was cradled in her arms. Then, for a moment, Exuperancia allowed herself to vocally express her own grief as she softly wept to herself, "I don't want any more of mine to die." Soon, Pablo and his parents, Victorio and Antonina, who were Josefita's godparents, would be there to dress and prepare her angel baby for the velatorio del angel (angel wake) and funeral procession.

After the angel woke in the parish church of Santa Rosa de Lima, carriages awaited outside the church for the funeral procession. It was likely a sunny and cool day on the 2nd of May. Pablo tenderly placed the small white casket with Josefita inside the hearse, a horse-drawn carriage. The hearse was named the "car of the little angels," carro de los angelitos. It had a "light and open frame, surrounded by railings on wheels painted white, with light blue silk curtains." Josefita was dressed in a white gown with a blue ribbon around her waist and flowers surrounding her bonnet. White is the "color of virgins... blue is the color that the Virgin Mary loves best." Because the Cementerio La

---

91 Pablo Montaña, "Biografía de la Familia, datos auténticos," p. 10.
92 Robben, Death, Mourning, and Burial-A Cross-Cultural Reader, p. 174.
93 Ibid, p. 171
95 Ibid.
96 Robben, Death, Mourning, and Burial-A Cross-Cultural Reader, p. 173.
*Piedad* was located several kilometers outside of town, beyond the city's fringes, all who were in the procession drove in carriages. Behind the hearse were two carriages.  

Pablo, his parents, and his son Pablo José (2nd) were probably in the first carriage. And Exuperancia's parents were probably in the second. Exuperancia might have remained at home because she was in her third trimester.

At the cemetery, the municipal custodian nailed the lid onto the casket. The custodian then led the family to where Josefita would be buried, down solar (street) 19 to sepulcher number 604. Holding his son's hand, Pablo paused for a moment when they passed solar 13, and his eyes found sepulcher number 856, marked by a small cement cross. This was where their second son, Pablo José (1st), was buried over three years ago.

They named their next child after him, a typical practice when infants died young. Pablo looked around and squinted his eyes. In the distance, he saw a small area with dirt mounds and wondered if that was the burial place of his dear Jacinta and José Victorio. But he would never know. When they reached the burial site of Josefita, the small group of people gathered around, Abuelos Victorio and Antonina, Abuelos Ildefonso and Sandalia, little Pablo José, and Pablo. Abuela Antonina held José Victorio's little hand while Pablo recited a prayer and gave the sign of the cross as the small casket was placed into the burial chamber. Little Pablo José looked up at his father and asked where his baby sister was. Pablo gently smiled down at him and quietly answered, "*subió al cielo, mi hijito, subió al cielo.*"

---

97 Pablo Montaña, "Biografía de la Familia, datos auténticos," p. 15.
98 Ibid, p. 16.
In 1908, Pablo and Exuperancia chose to leave their homeland along with hundreds of thousands of others and sought new opportunities in the America’s. However, while the New World provided opportunities, with these came new heartaches. Between 1908 and 1923, five of the twelve children of Pablo and Exuperancia died in infancy (See Figure 23). The cause of death for all the children who died, except Josefita, was Gastro-Entero-Colitis, a stomach infection. Josefita died from an Esophageal Atresia, a rare birth defect when the baby is born without part of the esophagus, which makes it impossible for a child to receive enough nutrition. The little boy Pablo José (2nd), mentioned in the last pages of this family saga, lived to adulthood. After Josefita, Exuperancia gave birth to seven more children: Santiago Alfonso, Agapito, Silvano, Josefa Esperanza, María Esther, Aurea, and Dora Nélida. Aurea died in the beginning of the summer of 1923 when she was eight months old from the same cause of death as her siblings,

---

Gastro-Entero-Colitis. Dora Nélida died when she was twelve years old. In total, Pablo and Exuperancia had twelve children, six boys and six girls, half lived to adulthood.

Exuperancia's parents, Ildefonso Fernandez and Sandalia San Juan, both stayed in Argentina, and both were buried in the Cementerio La Piedad. Pablo's parents, Victorio Montaña and Antonina Carnero, moved back to Spain sometime after 1915. They both died in Cañizo.

EPILOGUE

Cañizo, Spain, 1 November 2021, All Saints Day, 4:00 in the afternoon. Crowds of people from the town quickly paced down the dirt road to the cemetery just before four o'clock in the afternoon. My daughter, husband, and I joined the throng. It was overcast and cold. Like ghostly spirits, the biting wind moved easily through the layers of clothing we had on, chilling us to the bone. We passed the ancient bodega ruins. The bodegas looked strangely like an unorganized graveyard. The mounds of dirt piled high and surrounded the concrete door that marked, like a tombstone, the entrance of the cellar. Along the way, we saw the fields with their green shoots of wheat splash the countryside with color, covering the dirt that once provided life to the vineyards that have long since vanished.

We entered the gates of the tiny cemetery. On the left was the older section, with dirt mounds, cast iron grave markers, and concrete borders. Looking to our right was the new area with large granite sepulchers, each one marking the place of the family

101 Ibid, p. 15.
102 Pablo Montaña, "Biografía de la Familia, datos autenticos," p. 16 and 17.
tombstone. My cañizera friend tapped me on the shoulder, pointed to our left, and told me that this was the infant's burial place. The ground was bare, free from weeds or grass, and had eroded to a flat surface. There were no more than a dozen crosses marking tiny graves, some with plaques, some without.

One little grave caught my attention. Someone had carefully dug and mounded the ground surrounding it, the concrete cross had a fresh coat of white paint, and several bunches of fresh flowers adorned it. I bent down closer to read the plaque. I saw that it was a burial site for not only one angel baby, but two. It read, "Here lies the boy, Amable de la Rua, died the 26th of April 1965, at 18 months of age." Then underneath the heading of Amable was another inscription, "and the girl, Violeta de la Rua, died the 18th of April 1971 at 24 hours of age. Remembered by their parents and siblings, R.I.P." My heart ached. Like Exuperancia, within a few years, this ill-stricken mother put to rest two of her children; a son who was about José Victorio's age when he died in Argentina and a daughter who only lived a few hours. I longed to know the story of the de la Rua family. How did these children die? What were the local circumstances of their death? How many siblings did they have? Who came to paint the cross and mound the dirt, was it the siblings, or an aged parent, or both? Why did they name their son Amable? As I looked at the meticulously groomed burial site, I could see that Amable was a fitting name for this child. Amable comes from Latin that means "the one who loves" or "the one who feels love." The manicured grave testifies that someone remembers, someone still grieves and still loves.

I got up from my daydreaming and spent a few moments in the old section of the cemetery scanning for familiar family names (Carnero, Montaña, Herrero), then snapped a
photo or two from my cell phone. I looked around. Everyone had gathered in the new section of the cemetery. Clad in his vestments, the priest led the congregation in a ceremony to remember their dead. He recited scripture, and the people chanted back, praying for their ancestor's quick release from purgatory. Their rhythmic sounds danced with the wind.

Now... I see myself standing there in the cemetery with my husband, daughter, and all the Cañizeros, and time stands still. Cañizo seems like a misty land far away, a Brigadoon. When Pablo lived in Cañizo at the turn of the century, a thousand people lived in the town. Now, there are no more than two hundred. If the population trend continues, I wonder what Cañizo, rich in its Catholic rituals and traditions, will look like in the next few decades. Will it still be there when my children return to Spain? Or will it only exist in the pages of its history? Like Jacinta and José Victorio's unmarked graves and the unnamed crosses in the infant area in the Cañizo cemetery, some of those pages are indeed missing, mysteries that are lost at sea.

But this research has not only helped me understand things lost but things alive, and things existing in our time.

Starting when they were young, Pablo and Exuperancia stayed grounded by their Catholic rituals and beliefs in the uncertain events of their day. Rituals like last rites, extreme unction, and even a will, prepared grandfathers Bartolomé Carnero and Felipe San Juan for their imminent death. A belief in the afterlife (heaven, purgatory, and hell) provided meaning and purpose to these rituals. The practice of baptizing their infant babies, together with a belief that these children were saved, comforted Pablo and Exuperancia, knowing that when they died, their angel babies went straight to heaven.
These days, Catholic traditions and beliefs have lived on in the generations of their descendants. The granddaughter of Pablo and Exuperancia has faced life struggles like civil unrest, family divorce, hospitalizations, cancer, and accidents. Through it all, her Catholic devotion and faith kept her grounded and hopeful.

Pablo and Exuperancia experienced epidemics, diseases, and pestilence, and with that came some horrific and unimaginable neglect. Nowadays, we still grapple with the mysteries of disease and pandemics; then battle with best practices of dealing with the deceased. For example, a few months ago, a newspaper headline announced, "A mass COVID grave in Peru has left families bereft--and fighting for reburial." It seems that an overwhelming number of bodies swamped the hospital in the city of Iquitos. Hence, the governor ordered the local health department to bury the 400 cadavers in an "unmarked clearing south of the city." In the chaos at the hospital, relatives went seeking information about their loved ones only to be turned away. A Peruvian woman named, Teresa Ahuanaris, said that "we had nowhere to turn to get the answer to the question "Where is my mom?... we found out from the press that the bodies had been dumped."104

Pablo and Exuperancia's story is not just for their time and place: in the villages of Cañizo, Villárdiga, and the city of Rosario. Their story is not only for the three million Spanish emigrants who left Spain for the dream, Hacer la America! Like the unknown hand who tenderly cared for Amable and Violeta de la Rua's gravesite and the tender wheat sprouts growing amidst the bygone vineyards, this story can help one relate to things lost and things alive.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


Montaña, José Victorio. "Libro de bautizados en la Parroquia de Santa María de Realengo de Villárdiga," *Archivo Historico Diocesano de Zamora*, Villárdiga,


Secondary Sources


Pascual, Cecilia M. "The cholera epidemic as a condenser of meanings: urban, cultures, clinical narratives and hygiene policies in Rosario, Argentina, 1886-1887,"


Shumway, Jeffrey M. *The Case of the Ugly Suitor & Other Histories of Love, Gender, & Nation in Buenos Aires, 1776-1870.* University of Nebraska Press, 2005.
