

REALISTIC TREATMENT OF EMOTIONAL CONFLICTS
IN THE WORKS OF CARMEN LAFORET

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PREFACE

PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THIS STUDY

This study of the works of Carmen Laforet was undertaken after reading two of her short stories, Al colegio and Rosamunda. These cuENTOS made such an outstanding impression because the vivid and haunting characterizations and the sharp expressions of longing and anguish were so real that the feelings of the characters were transmitted to the reader. They prompted a desire to know more about the writings of this author who can make her readers suffer through the painful and moving experiences of her characters but who, unlike many Spanish authors, usually avoids leaving them with a feeling of desolation and despair. She accomplishes this by closing her narratives with a note of hopeful uncertainty about things to come.

In all of her writings Carmen Laforet makes little use of description of the physical appearance of characters, setting, and location, or of development of plot. Most of her stories could have taken place anywhere. Instead, her emphasis is on characterization. Her works are filled with personalities who strike against each other, the psychologically disturbed, individuals filled with anguish and longings for unfulfilled desires, disillusioned and

smiling adolescents, lonely individuals moved about by cruel forces, vagabonds, vague and mysterious men, persons suffering from conflict with moral responsibilities and religious beliefs.

The purpose of this study is to explore and examine the nature of the emotional conflicts that Carmen Laforet has portrayed in her writings and to determine her treatment of these. In general, the conflicts can be identified as those that involve inter-personal relationships and those that involve conflict with environmental and sociological factors. These will be discussed under seven different areas of conflict: (1) person with his family (mother, father, siblings, relatives); (2) person with his spouse and/or spouse's family; (3) person with friends and/or other individuals; (4) person with self; (5) person with his environment (economic status, social status, home); (6) person with religion; (7) and person with customs and mores.

The complete works of Carmen Laforet were read as published in Novelas, one volume which includes her three long novels, seven short novels, ten short stories, a prologue, and introductory comments by the author to each novel and group of works.¹ This "Primer tomo" contains

¹Carmen Laforet, Novelas (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1963).

the following novels: Unas líneas de la autora (Prólogo), Nada, La isla y los demonios, La llamada, El último verano, Un novizago, El piano, La niña, Los emplazados, El viaje divertido, and La mujer nueva. The following cuentos are also included: La muerta, El veraneo, La fotografía, En la edad del pato, Última noche, Rosamunda, Al colegio, El regreso, Un matrimonio, and El aguinaldo.

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CHAPTER I

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF CARMEN LAFORET

Carmen Laforet has been declared by some critics as the first important woman writer in Spain since Concha Espina, whose most famous work, La esfinge maragata was published in 1914 and whose novel Altar mayor won the Premio Nacional de Literatura in 1926.² Of all the modern Spanish authors of post Civil War novels, Carmen Laforet has obtained, along with Camilo José Cela, the greatest popularity and renown inside and outside Spain. Several circumstances, in addition to the excellence of her first novel Nada, contributed to her sudden prominence and popularity. One of them was the establishment of the Eugenio Nadal prize by the directors of the weekly Destino of Barcelona in 1944, a prize that continues to be the most distinguished literary award given in Spain. It was established in honor of the young editorial secretary of that newspaper, Eugenio Nadal, who died that year. The first novel to receive this prize was Nada. This circumstance alone was sufficient to make Carmen Laforet famous overnight, though she was only twenty-three and had been completely unknown

²Richard E. Chandler and Kessel Schwartz, A New History of Spanish Literature (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), p. 259.

to the literary circles of Spain.³ She opened the contemporary period of invasion of women into the field of Spanish letters, where they have competed with men with dignity and brilliance for a period of twenty years. In no epoch have there been so many women cultivating the novel, one of the most significant facts in Spanish literature of the post-war period.⁴ This situation is probably due in part to the increase in attendance of women at the universities with the consequent improvement of their capacity for major literary undertakings, but no doubt it was encouraged by the success of Laforet.

The Spanish critic, Juan Luis Alborg, in discussing the works of fifteen selected Spanish novelists of today, states that Nada and La familia de Pascual Duarte by Cela were the novels that raised the Spanish novel to a level approaching that of the early twentieth century, and captured the interest and curiosity of the Spanish public with a result that was almost sensational. The Spanish public had lost the custom of buying books by native authors, but Carmen Laforet's Nada sold like "daily bread", made the public aware that a Spanish novel once more existed, and

³Rodolfo Cardona (ed.), Novelistas españoles de Hoy (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1959), p. 28.

⁴Emiliano Diez-Echarri and José María Roca Franquesa, Historia de la literatura española e hispanoamericana (Madrid: Aguilar, 1960), p. 1397.

made the editing of the Spanish novel a good business again. Alborg says:

Nada . . . se vendió, en cambio, como el pan, hasta el punto de que pocas novelas españolas se habrán vendido tanto. Con ella, pues, se lograba el milagro de que la novela española se convirtiera hasta en un claro negocio editorial, y ella fue la que acostumbró a nuestro público a la idea de que volvía a existir una novela española, y le tornó a la perdida costumbre de comprarla.⁵

There have been fifteen editions and more than one hundred thousand copies of Nada sold.⁶ It went on to win further honors by being awarded in 1949 the Fastenrath Prize of the Royal Spanish Academy, given to a published novel in honor of the great German Hispanist, Johannes Fastenrath.

Although he considers Nada an important book, it is the belief of Alborg that Carmen Laforet gained fame for Nada not because it is an exceptional novel, but because it was the first Nadal prize winner. He believes the result would have been the same if the book had been less superior. If it had been published today when there is an abundance of Spanish novelists, its diffusion and fame would be much less and its author would not have been elevated to her present high position in the literary circles of Spain.

⁵Juan Luis Alborg, Hora actual de la novela española (Madrid: Taurus, 1958), p. 132.

⁶Chandler and Schwartz, op. cit., p. 260.

In his opinion, there have been many Spanish novels superior to Nada published since 1944 which have not aroused such public interest.⁷

Carmen Laforet, in her book Mis páginas mejores,⁸ gives a short autobiography. She was born September 6, 1921 in Barcelona. At the age of two she went with her parents to live in Las Palmas in the Canary Islands. Her father, who as an architect, was also a professor of the school La Escuela de Peritaje Industrial, and this position took him there. He was from Seville, the son of a French father and Basque mother. Educated in Barcelona, he was a champion marksman, a good boatman, and had won numerous bicycle races. He taught Carmen and her brothers, Edward and John, to swim, to endure long excursions through the interior of the island, and the art of good marksmanship with the pistol.

Her mother married when she was eighteen and Carmen, her first child, was born when she was twenty. The mother died at the age of thirty-three, while the family was still living in the Canary Islands. Carmen remembers her as small of stature, kind and friendly, highly intelligent, the possessor of enormous spiritual energy, and an inflexible

⁷Ibid., pp. 133-134.

⁸Carmen Laforet, Mis páginas mejores (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1956), pp. 9-11.

Castilian sense of duty. She taught her children the importance of truth, of not leaving tasks half done, and of accepting responsibility for their own actions. The author's relationship with her two brothers, she states, has always been one of mutual understanding and companionship. Later, her father remarried. She refers to her step-mother as one who conducted herself like those in fairy stories. She says of her:

. . . a pesar de todas mis resistencias a creer en los cuentos de hadas, me confirmó su veracidad, comportándose como las madrastas de esos cuentos. De ella aprendí que la fantasía siempre es pobre comparada con la realidad.⁹

The end of the Spanish Civil War, in September, 1939, allowed Carmen to return to Barcelona, where she lived for three years with an aunt and studied philosophy and literature at the University of Barcelona in preparation for entering Law School at the University of Madrid. She did not finish her work in either school. In January, 1944 while living in Madrid, this girl, whose only previous publication had been a Mother's Day article in a magazine, began writing the novel, Nada, the idea for which came from the shock she experienced upon her arrival in Barcelona immediately after the end of the Spanish Civil War, far from the friendly and peaceful world of the Canary Islands.¹⁰

⁹Ibid., pp. 10-11.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 13.

The book was written hastily, in fact, the first chapter appeared in print just as she had penned it the first time. She really had no time for revision because the closing date for the newly announced Nadal competition was near. She completed the book in September.

There was an interval of seven years between the first and second novel during which Miss Laforet married the writer and journalist, Manuel Cerezales, and had her first three children. She wrote nothing the first three years of this period. Then she began to publish some miscellaneous articles and various short stories. Among them was "una estampa de vida", Al colegio, and two short stories, Rosemunda and La muerta, published later in one volume entitled La muerta. Of her articles she says:

Mis artículos son intrascendentes, casi son confidencias, ninguno de ellos trata de temas que no entren puramente dentro de la libre composición literaria.¹¹

She wrote her second novel, La isla y los demonios, published in February, 1952, while awaiting the birth of a fourth child.

Seven short novels followed, written between 1952 and 1955, as well as some magazine articles. Under the title of La llamada, four of the short novels, Un noviazgo, El piano, La lladama, and El último verano, were published

¹¹Ibid., p. 37.

in one volume in 1954. Her third novel, La mujer nueva, was published in 1955 and that same year was awarded the Menorca prize, the largest monetary award given in Spain, established in memory of Fernando Rubio.¹² In 1956 the book received the Miguel Cervantes award, the "Premio Nacional de Literatura."

Carmen Laforet is now the mother of five children and resides with her family in Madrid, where she has been living since 1942. She divides her time between domestic and literary tasks. Her fourth novel, La insolación, the first of a trilogy Tres pasos fuera del tiempo, was published in Barcelona by Editorial Planeta in March, 1963. Al volver la esquina, the second of the group, has also been published, and the author is in the process of writing the third, Jaque Mate. The three books mark three periods in the life of a man, Martín Soto, beginning in 1940 in his fourteenth year, and also " . . . tres momentos de la vida de estos últimos veinte años en España."¹³

Of her own success as an author Carmen Laforet has said:

Es difícil imaginar a un joven más dispuesto a seguir un duro camino literario, y que haya

¹²Ibid., p. 207.

¹³Carmen Laforet, La insolación (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1963), pp. 7-8.

encontrado un comienzo más fácil; una popularidad más inesperada.¹⁴

She admits that it is impossible for her to correct a book because she does not have great patience. Therefore, if some of her pages are written in correct and harmonious Spanish, it is a spontaneous result, ". . . es porque así salió de mi pluma, espontáneamente. . . . al leer unas galeradas, es raro que las corrija, porque, preocupada por la idea general del libro, las olvido." The author has stated that her chief interests are "la observación, la creación de la vida." She is concerned with the vigor of her characters, the manner of relating the facts, which she expresses objectively in order that the reader may be the judge and accept or reject them as he pleases. Her profound love of life is the motive and inspiration for her vocation as a novelist. The world about which she writes is that of the novelist and ". . . no es mi autobiografía, como han querido ver algunos críticos."¹⁵

As previously stated, the novel Nada has prompted much discussion by readers and critics alike, among whom was Azorín,¹⁶ who admired Carmen Laforet and wrote an

¹⁴Laforet, Mis páginas mejores, op cit., p. 7.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 8-9.

¹⁶Marguerite C. Hand, "Azorín in 1960 and after," Hispania, XLV (March, 1962), p. 34.

article about the book at the time of its first appearance in 1944. Professor Sherman Eoff of Washington University in an article on Nada regards the book as a rather conspicuous exception to the heavy atmosphere of discouragement concerning man's place in the world, which is a prominent aspect of the contemporary Spanish novel. He considers it unique in its decisiveness of technique and its concentration of artistic energy toward a novelistic goal. He states that Carmen Laforet has blended one version of nihilistic outlook with a distinctive literary form and her accomplishment has the appearance of an enthusiastic experimentation in reproducing a vision of "mechanistic dynamics"--the motivation of human bodies in an area of relationships dominated by physical forces. She gives a vivid image of human beings tossed to and fro as though impelled by a law of mechanics.¹⁷

Some critics feel that the message of Nada is that of the decadence of modern Spain. "Others see it as an existentialism of people hemmed in by various boundaries or limiting situations they cannot overcome, unable to communicate, gnawed by constant suffering and remorse." The characters fit into almost a Dostoievskian mold with solitude, frustration, hate, misunderstanding, suffering,

¹⁷Sherman Eoff, "Nada by Carmen Laforet: A Venture in Mechanistic Dynamics," Hispania, XXXV (May, 1952), 207-211.

as their daily lot. The work is "tremendista", though no tremendous events take place. It is doubtful whether the young author had any ideology in mind when she wrote the book, but she has summed up beautifully an age where faith in absolute values has given way to the search for one's own authenticity in the face of nothingness.¹⁸ In an article on present day novels published in Books Abroad, Jacob Ornstein and James Y. Causey describe Nada as a story of people living in a spiritual and material void, in nothingness. It could be a tale of Europeans in many lands leading a hand-to-mouth existence in a wretched environment.¹⁹ Although Laforet denies that Nada is autobiographical, Zamora, a member of the jury that selected the book for the Nadal prize, believes the novel has the unmistakable flavor of authenticity, of something experienced and transformed into literature. He considers it not best in quality but the most publicized and talked-about book in the Spanish language in this half-century. Its greatest charm is in its spontaneity and freshness. It is comparable to Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë. It is not occupied

¹⁸Chandler and Schwartz, op. cit., p. 260.

¹⁹Jacob Ornstein and James Y. Causey, "Novels and Novelists in Present Day Spain," Books Abroad, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), XXIV (Summer 1950), 246.

with style and language. Of Andrea, the protagonist of the book, he says, "she keeps throughout the novel her smile of astonishment and is like Laforet herself".²⁰ Although Laforet gives Brontë no credit for either her techniques or choice of material, Alborg believes that Wuthering Heights may have influenced Laforet in writing Nada. He concurs with Zamora that the novel is convincing because the fundamental base of the novel comes from experiences the author has lived. Alborg finds parts of the novel are not genuine, however, and he considers this a true defect in the book. He sights as examples the occupation of Gloria and the attack that took place in the "barrio chino". He says:

Hay ingenuidades, sin embargo, como la ocupación de Gloria para traer dinero a casa, que representan un verdadero fallo en la novela. Lo mismo podría decirse de la incursión, totalmente innecesaria, por el "barrio chino" barcelonés, que parece incrustada allí para dar un remalazo de acento masculino, completamente equivocado.²¹

As to the ability of Carmen Laforet, Alborg states that she has the rare secret of defining with accurate strokes, human passions, the world, and the weaknesses of human beings of her own sex. Her women characters are much better than

²⁰R. Vázquez Zamora, "Appearance of Carmen Laforet on the Spanish Literary Scene," Books Abroad, XXX (Autumn 1956), 394-396.

²¹Alborg, op. cit., pp. 133-135.

the men, who escape the reader frequently in a cloud of idealization and deformation, but the women are always "dotadas de sólida verdad". Laforet possesses an instinct so precise that she is able to delve into the secrets of their ridiculous situation or their wretchedness in order to capture their enthusiasm, their ardor, their illusions.²² She seems particularly interested in her female characters, and the majority of her protagonists are women.

Concerning her second novel, La isla y los demonios, Carmen Laforet wrote that the title of the book corresponds to the two forces that made her write it. The first, the most important, was the embellished and magical memories of her adolescence spent on the island of Gran Canaria where the story takes place. The other, ". . . la trama de pasiones humanas--siempre las mismas en todas las latitudes--, a las que yo llamo "los demonios."²³ These human passions, "los demonios", are prevalent in all parts of the world, lodged in the heart of all men. These demons are the seven capital sins.²⁴ All the characters in the novel are demon-ridden.

²²Ibid., p. 136.

²³Laforet, Mis páginas mejores, op. cit., p. 57.

²⁴Laforet, Novelas, op. cit., p. 634.

Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, in a criticism of contemporary Spanish literature, wrote that La isla y los demonios would be Carmen Laforet's best novel if she had not written Nada. Although the narrative material in this second novel is repetitious of the first, the story is more skillfully written.²⁵ Alborg agrees with Torrente Ballester when he writes that if La isla y los demonios had been the Nadal winner of 1944, it would have received the recognition which it merits. It demonstrates the author's ability to repeat her first success. Alborg believes that this second novel has the same good qualities and the same defects as Nada. It holds the interest of the reader, the author's ability to narrate is evident (always in the manner of the traditional and classical novel), and the style is clear, pure, and concise. The women continue to be the principal characters and the most accurately portrayed. Carmen Laforet is a "skillful painter" of their appearance, their gestures, their words. The men continue to be elusive, except for some well-done episodes with José, the brother of the heroine Marta.²⁶

²⁵Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, Panorama de la literatura española contemporánea (Madrid: Ediciones Guadarrama, 1961), I, 423.

²⁶Alborg, op. cit., p. 138.

La isla y los demonios is considered by Professor Cyrus C. De Coster of Kansas University as a less forceful novel than Nada, although similar in theme, structure, and technique. There is less tension between characters; there is not the unrelieved bickering and brutality of Nada; nor, since the family is wealthy, is there the oppressive preoccupation with money, the constant fight against hunger, the squalor and filth of surroundings. The gloom is relieved by the beauty of the landscape and gardens. Most of the action takes place in Las Palmas, which the author describes vividly as having charm and beauty, sandy beaches, luxuriant flowers, and craggy, volcanic mountains. In the holocaust of the Civil War it is an asylum of peace, a marked contrast to Laforet's typical distraught characters. It is not a regional novel, for only the servant Vicenta is a characteristic island type, but it is the only one of her works in which the setting plays a significant role. Both Nada and La isla y los demonios are pessimistic in tone. The majority of the characters are unhappy, tormented individuals.²⁷

More important than the setting, however, is the plot, which Zamora points out to be more complicated than that of Nada. The author uses more varied techniques and

²⁷Cyrus C. De Coster, "Carmen Laforet: A Tentative Evaluation," Hispania, XL (May, 1957), 188.

is more conscious of style. Sentiments and characters are analyzed more deeply. The Marta of La isla y los demonios could well be Andrea of Nada at fifteen or sixteen, but the books are not continuous and there are scarcely any autobiographical elements apparent in the plot of La isla y los demonios. It follows the author's previous tone: literature of the smiling disillusionment. Marta goes on, as Andrea of Nada, maintaining the same spirit, full of pure inclinations that clash with brutal reality. Also, as in Nada, there is a familiar group of persons who border on the psychopathic. There is no religious finality in the presentation of emotional problems or consequences. The best part of the novel, in Zamora's opinion, is the most objective in theme, namely the story of the servant of the house, Vicenta, and her daughters. Here Laforet begins to describe from an adult point of view the lives of others, and in this achieves "extraordinary and expressive vigor".²⁸ In this section she presents some of the superstitions and folklore of the mountain-dwelling natives of the Canary Islands.

There is greater variety in Laforet's volume of stories, called La muerta, and in her volume of short novels, called La llamada. In spite of the harrassing struggle

²⁸Zamora, op. cit., p. 396.

with economic difficulties, many of the characters maintain their optimism and their faith in themselves and in others. Some find consolation and a source of strength in religion, which had played virtually no role in her first two novels. The brief novel, El viaje divertido, has a moralistic twist with a real emphasis on religion, in a highly sentimental tone. El aguinaldo and El noviazgo belong to this new orientation. Of the short novel, El noviazgo, Alborg says, ". . . se centra en torno a dos personajes que son puro acierto. Una obra lograda en este género." He considers the male protagonist of this story one of the best of his kind in literature, "el mejor de su especie que lleva creado hasta ahora."²⁹

Of Laforet's short works Professor De Coster considers the best to be El verano, El noviazgo, and El regreso, written in her earlier manner with none of her new idealism. La muerta, La fotografía, El último verano, and El piano, are glorifications of characters who, in spite of adversity, maintain their courage, their optimism, and their basic faith. At times, as in El último verano, Laforet's optimism is facile and she falls into the sentimental. She is even more unconvincing in El matrimonio. A rich young playboy marries a chorus girl when he discovers she is

²⁹Alborg, op. cit., p. 141.

expecting a child by him. His family outs him off, but his new responsibilities prove to be his salvation. The characterization of the macabre, would-be actress in La llamada is in the traditional style of Laforet's women characters and is good, but the conclusion is contrived and unsatisfactory. In all these stories the emphasis is on characterization rather than on plot. Several of them are merely brief sketches which strive to catch a mood or depict a character. De Coster considers them uneven in quality, "the best of them are very good; the weakest do not rise above the level of the fiction in women's magazines."³⁰ In a discussion of recent novels of Spain, Dr. Willis Knapp Jones of Miami University describes Miss Laforet's writings through this period by saying:

To this author, a novel is a combination of a little sentiment, a little imagination, and the observation of many and varied types. She gives the impression of a smiling but disillusioned person. Seize on a slice of life, feel it and mould it into a story, is her formula.³¹

Laforet's fifth book and third novel, La mujer nueva, is her most ambitious work to date. It is a longer novel, the action covers a period of some fifteen years, and the locale shifts between Villa de Robre, an imaginary small

³⁰De Coster, op. cit., p. 190.

³¹Willis Knapp Jones, "Recent Novels of Spain: 1936-56," Hispania, XL (September, 1957), 306.

town in the province of León, and Madrid. In the book Laforet treats more fully the theme of religion. De Coster considers her only partially successful in her attempt and that La mujer nueva is a weaker novel than Nada or La isla de los demonios.³² In the opinion of Jones, "Though it won the 200,000 peseta 1955 Menorca Prize, the largest sum ever paid a Spanish author, as well as the 1956 'Premio Nacional de Literatura', it is dull, with religious talk replacing action."³³ Three previously mentioned sources, Chandler and Schwartz, and the two Spanish critics, Torrente Ballester and Alborg, all agree with the above criticism, that the theme of this novel does not draw out Laforet's capabilities and that Paulina, the heroine, fails to be convincing, except in part. It is a story of human passions. Alborg considers the first part of the book to be an objective, realistic treatment of the emotional conflicts of Paulina (an adulterous and tormented woman), as much better than the part that follows after she experiences a religious crisis. The novel then shifts to the religious and ethical aspirations of "la mujer nueva". He states the conversion of Paulina is too rapid and easy and that there is a lack of development of psychological motives. Paulina, the

³²De Coster, loc. cit.

³³Jones, loc. cit.

sinner, is absolutely convincing, but "la mujer nueva" is too disoriented, and becomes "dashed to pieces on the rocks of vulgarity and sentimentalism".³⁴ Torrente Ballester believes the first part of the novel superior to the second, both because of the authenticity of the material and the manner of relating the story.³⁵

In a review of La mujer nueva in Books Abroad, Olga F. Ferrer of the University of Buffalo asserts that were it not widely known by her own admission that Laforet became converted to Catholicism, one would wonder "if the psychological incoherence of the main character and overwhelming profusion of a vapid religious language are not aimed at a parody of a theme about which so many readers in Spain have felt happy and by which they have been edified." Ferrer considers the extramarital love affair dull and of no value to the book.³⁶

On the positive side, Zamora believes that in her last narratives Carmen Laforet has found her balance and has gained in art what she has lost in "creative frenzy" and in Neo-Romanticism. While he admires her powerful outbursts of light and shadow, of one's own purity and

³⁴Alborg, op. cit., p. 139.

³⁵Torrente Ballester, op. cit., p. 424.

³⁶Olga F. Ferrer, Review of La mujer nueva, Books Abroad, XXX (Fall 1956) 404.

other's impurity as in Nada, he feels that now she has found the right pitch and that her personages are more simply human.³⁷ De Coster considers parts of the novel--the account of Paulina's adolescence and her idyllic youthful romance with Eulogio--as well done. Laforet succeeds in making her alternating periods of elation and doubt after her conversion, quite convincing. Other parts ring false. There is lack of motivation for the final action between Paulina and Eulogio. The whole episode of Julián Mateos, the apprentice, and the brutal murder he commits, are irrelevant to the main action. He concludes that while La mujer nueva is readable, and in some ways interesting, it does not bear close analysis. "It has in large part been arranged to illustrate the author's thesis."³⁸

In a preface to excerpts from the book, Laforet states that her own conversion in December, 1951 to the Catholic faith motivated the theme of this novel. Although she had been baptized at birth, she had never before concerned herself with religion. Of the book itself she claims to prefer it to the rest. She says, "La mujer nueva--técnicamente--ha sido también la más difícil de mis

³⁷Zamora, loc. cit.

³⁸De Coster, op. cit., pp. 190-191.

novelas, y quizá por esto--o porque es la última que he hecho--la prefiero a las demás."³⁹

In a general summary of Laforet's works, De Coster points out that although her stories take place during the decade following the Civil War, except La isla y los demonios which occurs during the last months of the war, the war itself plays a small role in her work. Several secondary characters in La mujer nueva were assassinated during the war, but Laforet does not dwell on its horror or the tragedy of a divided people. We see reflected the difficult economic and arid spiritual conditions prevalent in present-day Spain, but she scarcely suggests the war was responsible for this. Her writing is completely apolitical. The pessimistic tone of many of her stories is common to much of the literature of the twentieth century. There is little actual violence in her work, one suicide and a murder. Sex plays an important role only in La mujer nueva, and here it is rapidly glossed over. In all her novels there are neurotic, warped individuals at odds with themselves and their families, with no direction to their lives, who succeed only in hurting each other. The pessimistic disheartenment of the individual expressed in Nada becomes progressively less dynamic in

³⁹Laforet, Mis páginas mejores, op. cit., p. 208.

succeeding novels. In her recent works Laforet strives to establish values to which the individual can cling, but when she is idealistic, she tends to be sentimental. Where religion is the answer, she is not entirely convincing.

Carmen Laforet, however, is considered one of the best young novelists writing in Spain today. She is eminently successful, for her books have been well received by both critics and the public. In the edition of her latest novel La insolación (1963), the editors state her books have been translated into eight different languages. She has definite qualities. She narrates well, is seldom dull, her style is simple and forceful. She is best when portraying the deluded individuals, those tortured with anguish and unfulfilled desires, unable to adjust to life. Most critics seem to feel her last four books, not including La insolación, fail to live up to the promise of Nada. Dr. De Coster suggests she is less successful when she attempts to express positive ideals because "Human weakness is easier to treat effectively than virtue."⁴⁰

Patt and Nozick in their anthology say that throughout the work of Carmen Laforet there is a sensitivity and accuracy of observation found in only a few of her

⁴⁰De Coster, op. cit., p. 191.

contemporaries. In their opinion she has been faithful to her chief interests, "la observación, la creación de la vida".⁴¹

⁴¹Beatrice P. Patt and Martin Nozick (eds.), The Generation of 1898 and After (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1961), p. 323.

CHAPTER II

REALISTIC TREATMENT OF EMOTIONAL CONFLICTS IN THE LONG NOVELS

The plot of Carmen Laforet's first novel, Nada,⁴² is basically very simple. The protagonist and narrator, Andrea, an eighteen-year-old orphan, arrived in Barcelona to stay with her grandmother in order to attend the university. She had hoped to find there a free and stimulating life but instead she became hopelessly and tragically entangled with the lives of the thwarted, antagonistic, abnormal members of her family, and Nada is the story of her experiences. The author is concerned with her characters and the portrayal of the moral and intellectual climate of postwar Spain. Throughout all the pages of the book one feels the deep and inevitable grief and pain suffered by the six persons of this family who, united by relationship but divided by indifference and dislike, live together in a shabby apartment in a house in "la calle de Aribau".

The chief interest of the book is centered in these six people, their discordant relationships, their frustrations, the futility of their lives, which is symbolized by the title, Nada, taken from a poem by Juan Ramón Jiménez.

⁴²Laforet, Novelas, op. cit., pp. 23-260. All references to the novel Nada are within these pages.

Professor De Coster pointed out in his discussion of the book that this spirit of nihilism, typical of the disillusionment of a country which had suffered the ravages of war, was emphasized by the dire economic straits into which the family had fallen and by the shabby, cluttered, filthy apartment in which they lived; however, the author was less concerned with analyzing the causes for this atmosphere of spiritual decadence than in studying the characters themselves.⁴³

The family of Andrea consisted of the decrepit old grandmother, unselfish but weak, whom Andrea said when she saw her, "conservaba una sonrisa de bondad tan dulce, que tuve la seguridad que era mi abuela"⁴⁴; Román an uncle who had been a promising musician and was capable of much charm but had done nothing with his talents and was devoting himself to unscrupulous deals on the black market; another uncle, Juan, a mediocre painter who refused to recognize his lack of real talent, who was half sick from living a deprived existence, and who compensated for his failures by treating his wife and family brutally; an unmarried aunt, Augustias, who had grown bitter and ill-tempered after being frustrated in love and who was working as a

⁴³De Coster, op. cit., p. 187.

⁴⁴Laforet, Novelas, op. cit., p. 25.

secretary to don Jerónimo, her former lover, now married to a woman he neglected because of his desire for Augustias; and Gloria, the wife of Juan, an attractive woman from a sensual point of view, a "child of the street" whom Juan had met during the war and had sent home to live with his mother when she became pregnant with his child. Andrea herself was an intelligent girl, courageous in the face of the poverty and the rancor of the home, the vagabond type determined to have her freedom and to pursue her education in spite of the indifferent and depressing circumstances in which she found herself.

Andrea's reaction to the physical environment when she arrived at the house en "la calle de Aribau" is described in her own words, ". . . me pareció todo una pesadilla. . . . Quise pensar que me habia equivocado de piso, . . ."

She saw an entrance hall lighted by a single, dim bulb that ". . . quedaba sujeta a uno de los brazos de la lámpara, magnífica y sucia de telarañas, que colgaba del techo. Un fondo oscuro de muebles colocados unos sobre otros como en las mudanzas" (page 25). About the family that gathered around her in the gloomy hall she felt: ". . . todas aquellas figuras . . . igualmente alargadas . . . quietas y tristes, como luces de un velatorio de pueblo" (pages 26-27). In describing her reaction to Antonio, the servant, she said, "Casi sentí erizarse mi piel al vislumbrar a una

de ellas, vestida con un traje negro . . . Todo en aquella mujer parecía horrible y desastrado, hasta la verdosa dentadura que me sonreía" (page 26). Particularly vivid is her description of the bathroom and her feelings about it:

En el manchado espejo del lavabo . . . se reflejaba el bajo techo cargado de telas de araña, y mi propio cuerpo procurando no tocar aquellas paredes sucias, . . . Parecía una casa de brujas . . . Las paredes tiznadas conservaban la huella de manos ganchudas, de gritos de desesperanza. Por todas partes los desconchados abrían sus bocas desdentadas rezumantes de humedad (pages 28-29).

Equally revolting and terrifying was her impression of the living room, which seemed to her like "la buhardilla de un palacio abandonado" in which she was to sleep on an improvised bed in the center of the room ". . . como un túmulo funerario rodeado de dolientes seres--aquella doble fila de sillones destripados--, una cama turca, cubierta por una manta negra, . . .". It was lighted by a single candle and "El hedor que se advertía en toda la casa llegó en una ráfaga más fuerte. Era un olor a porquería de gato" (page 29). Andrea described her reaction to the place and the people, both of which had changed so much since she visited there as a child, by saying:

Tenia una sensación de inseguridad frente a todo lo que allí había cambiado, y esta sensación se agudizó mucho cuando tuve que pensar en enfrentarme con los personajes que había entrevisto la noche antes . . . Y estaba allí en la cama, vacilando sin atreverme a afrontarlos (page 32).

After a discussion with Augustias the next morning in which the aunt warned Andrea against association with other members of the household and advising, ". . . no te dejaré dar un paso sin mi permiso" (page 35) Andrea said: "Yo me sentía oprimida como bajo un cielo pesado de tormenta, . . ." (page 37). Later she added: "Aquellos recorridos de Barcelona eran más tristes de lo que se pueda imaginar" (page 41). When she spoke of her relationship with the family she commented "con frecuencia me encontré sorprendida, entre aquellas gentes . . . por el aspecto de tragedia que tomaban los sucesos más mínimos, a pesar de que aquellos seres llevaban cada uno un peso, una obsesión real dentro de sí, . . ." (page 70). After the events that followed Roman's death by suicide, she said: "No sé cuántas horas estuve sin dormir, con los ojos abiertos y resecos recogiendo todos los dolores que pululaban, vivos como gusanos, en las entrañas de la casa" (page 249). Thus Andrea described, in general, her feelings about the house and the family with whom she spent a year.

Andrea was plagued by other environmental factors, both economic and social. Andrea had an income of two hundred pesetas a month which was sent directly to Augustias, who kept all of it and who reminded Andrea that ". . . en esta época no alcanzará ni para la mitad de tu manutención . . ." (page 36). Andrea was forced to subsist on the

meager and unappetizing food prepared for the family and could not participate in the custom of her best friend Ena to frequent the bar because she said: "Yo no tenfa dinero para una taza de café. Tampoco lo tenfa para pagar el tranvfa . . . ni para comprar castañas calientes a la hora del sol" (page 71). After Agustias' relationship with her employer became so compromising that she escaped by entering a convent, the allowance went directly to Andrea. Agustias admonished her to pay her grandmother for her board and added: "No te tengo que decir que gastas en ti el mínimo posible. El día que falte mi sueldo, esta casa va a ser un desastre" (page 100). However, the day that Agustias left the home Andrea announced she did not wish to eat her meals there and that she would pay only for her room. Juan replied ". . . tú contribuyes a la casa . . . porque yo . . . no estoy para mantener a nadie . . ." After the grandmother began to cry and announced that her granddaughter need not pay for room in her grandmother's house, it was decided Andrea would pay only for ". . . mi pan diario" (page 112). Thus, when her next allowance arrived Andrea went shopping and about this she said: . . . adquirí en seguida aquellas fruslerfas que tanto deseaba . . . jabón bueno, perfume y también una blusa nueva para presentarme en caso de Ena . . . Además unas rosas para su madre" (page 113). These expenditures resulted in lack

of money to buy food and a quarrel with Juan who said, "Te vas a morir de hambre" when, according to Andrea, "Me habia cogido bebiendo el agua que sobraba de cocer la verdura y que estaba fria olvidada en un rincón de la cocina, dispuesta a ser tirada" (page 116). Andrea refused to reconsider her living arrangements in spite of Juan's fury because she said:

La verdad es que me sentía más feliz desde que estaba desligada de aquel mudo de las comidas en la casa. No importaba que aquel mes hubiera gastado demasiado y apenas me alcanzara el presupuesto de una peseta diaria para comer: la hora del mediodía es la más hermosa en invierno. Una hora buena para pasarla al sol en un parque . . . A veces se me ocurría pensar, con delicia, en lo que sucedería en casa. Los oídos se me llenaban con los chillidos del loro y las palabrotas de Juan. Prefería mi vagabundeo libre (page 117).

However, Andrea admitted later that there were days when she was heavy hearted, not because of the events in "la calle de Aribau" but ". . . a la visión desenfocada de mis nervios demasiado afilados por un hambre que a fuerza de ser crónica llegué casi a no sentirla" (pages 129-130). She added that "En la calle de Aribau también pasaban hambre sin las compensaciones que a mí me reportaba" (page 118).

Andrea was also disturbed by lack of social status brought on by the gradual deterioration of both the economic and moral standards of the family. At one time the family had been a part of the social life of Barcelona but, according to Andrea, "Augustias era el único ser que se

conservaba asido desesperadamente a la sociedad, en la casa nuestra" and when she announced her intention of going into a convent friends came to say goodbye who ". . . eran las mismas que habian valsado a los compases del piano de la abuelita. . . . Todos recordaban los tiempos viejos de la casa" (page 101). Ena, Andrea's best friend whom she had avoided bringing to her home, said to her on one occasion: "--Hay cosas en ti que no me gustan, Andrea. Te avergüenzas de tu familia . . ." (page 148). Ena continued: "Y el día en que fui a buscarte a tu casa, . . . no podías disimular tu irritación y tu disgusto" (page 149).

On one occasion Andrea accepted an invitation to a party at the magnificent home of Pons, a wealthy classmate at the University, who had shown interest in her. As she stood before the elaborately dressed mother of Pons she recalled: "Me sentí en un momento angustiada por la pobreza de mi atavío" (page 196). About Pons she said "Mi amigo-- que me había suplicado tanto, que me había llegado a conmover con su cariño--aquella tarde sin duda, se sentía avergonzado de mí . . ." (page 198). She said to him, when he asked her to dance, "No, gracias. No me encuentro bien aquí y quisiera marcharme" (page 199). As Andrea left this house she knew that her dream of marrying Pons in order to escape her grandmother's house would never be

realized, in fact, she said: "Llegaba a mi casa, de la que ninguna invitación a un veraneo maravilloso me iba a salvar . . ." (page 202).

Andrea's reaction to the situation in which she found herself at Pons' party was very realistic. She said:

Me sentí muy tímida entre ellas . . . ganas de llorar . . . No me atrevía a separarme de Pons para nada y empecé a sentir con terror que él se ponía un poco nervioso delante de los . . . ojos cargados de malicia que nos estaban observando (page 196-197).

Even a girl with more experience than Andrea and more properly dressed, would have felt uncomfortable. The author's descriptions of the girl's feelings of desperation are so vivid that the reader identifies with her when, upon seeing a familiar face in the crowd, Andrea thought, "No sabía yo si acercarse a él, pues me sentía humilde y ansiosa de compañía como un perro . . ." (pages 197-198). One shares her discomfort when she apologizes to Pons, "Ya ves que ni siquiera he venido vestida a propósito. ¿No te has fijado que he traído unos viejos zapatos de deporte?" (page 200), an apology typical of any person who finds himself improperly dressed for the occasion.

Andrea's feeling of shame and humiliation concerning the status of the household was carried over in her attitude toward her grandmother. As she gazed on the picture of her grandparents she realized: "Me complací en pensar

en que los dos estaban muertos hacia años. . . . en pensar que nada tenía que ver la joven del velo de tul con la pequeña monja irreconocible que me había abierto la puerta" (page 33). Andrea said when she accompanied her grandmother to church: "Iba a mi lado tan contenta, que me atormentó un turbio recordamiento de no quererla más" (page 73). Some months later Andrea described her feelings for her grandmother when she said:

La miré con cariño. Tenía siempre respecto a ella unos vagos recordamientos. Algunas noches al volver a casa, en las épocas de gran penuria, cuando no había podido comer ni cenar, encontraba en mi mesilla un plato con un poco de verdura . . . o un mendrugo de pan . . . Comía, empujada por una necesidad más fuerte que yo, aquellos bocados de que se había privado la pobrecilla . . . (page 223).

When her grandmother smiled at her so sweetly she said ". . . me conmovían como si me agarrasen las raíces del espíritu hasta entrarme ganas de llorar" (pages 223-24). Thus Andrea's attitude, like that of the reader, becomes more compassionate toward this pathetic old woman whom Andrea said, in regard to the family, ". . . intenta entender a cada uno" (page 99).

Augustias was the one member of the family whom Andrea disliked from the beginning and toward whom she felt rebellious. The first words Augustias spoke to her were critical: "¿Cómo me podía yo imaginar que ibas a llegar de madrugada? . . . ¡que trastorno! Una criatura

así, sola . . .", to which Juan replied "--¡Ya está la bruja de Augustias estropeándolo todo!" (page 27). At the end of her first discussion with Augustias, Andrea said:

Estaba además desesperada porque me había dicho que no podría moverme sin su voluntad. Y la juzgaba sin ninguna compasión, corta de luces y autoritaria. . . . Lo cierto es que cuando se puso blanda al hablarme mal de Gloria, mi tía me fue muy antipática. Creo que pensé que tal vez no me iba a resultar desagradable disgustarla un poco . . . Yo le buscaba un detalle repugnante mientras ella continuaba su monólogo de órdenes y consejos, y al fin, vi sus dientes de un color sucio . . . (pages 36-37).

Later Andrea said:

Cuando Augustias me abrazaba o me dirigía diminutivos tiernos, yo experimentaba dentro de mí la sensación de que algo iba torcido y mal en la marcha de las cosas. . . . Cuando me veía o interesarme en la conversación de cualquier otro personaje de la casa, se volvía humilde en sus palabras. . . . Cuando, por el contrario, le parecía yo triste o agustada, se ponía muy contenta y se volvía autoritaria (pages 39-40).

Andrea quarreled with Augustias because Andrea wished to be independent and to be free to wander through the streets of Barcelona in order to know the city, and Augustias disapproved. Andrea said: "El momento de mi lucha con tía Augustias se acercaba cada vez más, como una tempestad inevitable. A la primera conversación que tuve con ella supe que nunca íbamos a entendernos" (page 63). Andrea disliked attending church with her because ". . . a todos los oficios religiosos, Augustias me hacía ir con ella y

le gustaba vigilar y criticar mi devoción" (page 73).

When Augustias returned home after a short absence, she was furious to find Andrea had slept in her room and she sent for Andrea. The girl described her emotions when she said ". . . me encontré en uno de mis periodos de rebeldía contra Augustias; el más fuerte de todos. Súbitamente me di cuenta de que no iba a poder sufrir más" (page 95).

The extent of Augustias' twisted ideas and feelings toward Andrea are revealed in the following accusations she made against Andrea just before she left home to enter a convent:

Tú me has fallado, me has decepcionado. . . . Tú has sido mi última ilusión y mi último desengaño, . . . --¡Si te hubiera cogido más pequeña, te habría matado a palos! . . . Durante quince días he estado pidiendo a Dios tu muerte, o el milagro de tu salvación (page 99).

Augustias in a final outburst added: "Aun Gloria tiene más disculpas que tú en sus ansias de emancipación y desorden" (page 99), and she lamented: "¡Oh! ¡Hubiera querido matarte cuando pequeña antes de dejarte crecer así! . . ." (page 100). Finally, Augustias began to cry, but Andrea said, ". . . no me causaba repugnancia, sino cierto placer" (page 100). Andrea described her reaction to the departure of Augustias when she said: "Yo estaba demasiado maravillada, pues el único deseo de mi vida ha sido que me dejen en paz hacer mi capricho y en aquel momento parecía que había llegado la hora de conseguirlo" (page 103).

Andrea was not the only person with whom Augustias was in conflict. Gloria was the object of her hate and insults and Juan quarreled with her because she mistreated his wife Gloria. Augustias blamed Gloria for the dissension and suffering in the home and said to Andrea: ". . . antes era como el paraíso y ahora . . . con la mujer de tu tío Juan ha entrado la serpiente maligna. Ella lo ha emponzoñado todo. Ella . . . ha vuelto loco a mi madre . . ." (page 99). Gloria hated Augustias and said ". . . ¡qué bien que se marche! . . . La otra noche me pegó Juan por su culpa" (page 102). Gloria referred to a beating Juan had given her following a quarrel between Gloria and Augustias. Augustias had discovered Gloria entering the house late at night and demanded to know where she had been. The screaming wakened the whole family. Juan interceded and expressed his hatred of Augustias when he said:

Y tú, bruja, ¿por qué te metes en lo que no te importa? ¿Qué tienes que ver tú con mi mujer? ¿Quién eres para impedirle que salga de noche, si le da la gana? Yo soy el único de esta casa a quien ella tiene que pedir permiso . . . ¡métete en tu cuarto y no adules más! (page 93).

Juan finally gave vent to his bitter feelings about Augustias in front of the family and friends gathered at the station to tell her good-bye. As the train was slowly leaving, Juan, in a wild race, started running along beside it screaming accusations at Augustias concerning her illicit

relationship with her employer. He ended by shouting: "¡Y desprecias a mi mujer! ¡Malvado! ¡Y te vas con tu aureola de santa! . . ." (pages 105-106).

Andrea's relationship with Gloria was quite satisfactory. Although she did not admire Gloria, she felt sorry for her. She said: "A mí gustaba hablar con ella porque no hacía falta contestarle nunca" . . . Creo que mi simpatía por ella tuvo origen el día en que la vi desnuda sirviendo de modelo a Juan" (page 43). For Andrea, Gloria was a comfort because she was the one person who did not interfere and who tried to make Andrea happy. On the other hand, Andrea was the one to whom Gloria could take her troubles and from whom she would receive sympathy after her violent clashes with both Juan and his brother Román. Gloria's parting words to Andrea when she left the house in "la calle de Aribau" were ". . . vuelve pronto, Andrea, ya sabes que yo te quiero mucho . . ." (page 258). Gloria's warm expression of friendship brought forth a realistic response. Andrea said, "La abracé, y, cosa extraña, sentí que la quería" (page 258).

Gloria was in constant conflict, however, with both her husband, Juan, and Román and was the object of the conflict between them. To Andrea, Gloria said: "--Román es un malvado . . . ya lo irás conociendo. A mí me ha hecho un daño horrible . . ." (page 45). Gloria claimed

that Román had made love to her when he first knew her as Juan's "mujer" and had led her to believe he wanted her. After she came to the home, he had treated her badly by provoking Juan into thinking she was unfaithful to him. Throughout the book one feels that Gloria loves Román in spite of the fact he shuns her, and that this is the cause of Juan mistreating his wife. There are numerous occasions when Gloria is lurking in the hall outside Román's room. In the end, however, when Román begged Gloria to come to his room, she had her moment of triumph and she said "Me has hecho llorar mucho, pero yo estaba esperando este momento . . . Si crees que aún me interesas, estás equivocado . . . Yo te odio, chico" (pages 186-187). To this Román replied: "Puedes venir tú mismo, si quieres . . . pero si no vienes esta noche, no te molestes en mirarme a la cara nunca más. Te doy tu última ocasión . . ." (page 187). Later, Andrea realized Gloria was crying. When Juan returned home and asked, "¿Qué pasa?", Gloria replied after a long pause: "--Nada--. Vamos a dormir" (page 188). This apparently ended the struggle between Román and Gloria but, following Román's suicide, Gloria became very ill and in her delirium asked monotonously concerning the details of his death. Finally she admitted to Andrea: "--Yo fui quien hizo que Román se matara. Yo le denuncié a la Policía

y él se suicidó por eso . . . Aquella mañana tenían que venir a buscarle . . ." (page 248). Andrea did not believe this. One is not sure if Gloria's hatred, which grew out of humiliation and rejection by Román, led her to betray Román. Andrea said it would be more truthful to say "Román había sido el espectro de un muerto. De un hombre que hubiera muerto muchos años atrás y que ahora se volviera por fin a su infierno . . ." (page 248). Román's death, however, did not solve Gloria's tortuous existence. In the words of Andrea, "Al pronto la vida me había parecido completamente igual. Los mismos gritos lo alborotaron todo. Juan le seguía pegando a Gloria" (page 254).

The relationship between Juan and Gloria, his wife, was a stormy one. Whenever there was a family argument, often provoked by Román, it seemed, "La rabia de Juan se desvió en un instante hacia la mujer y la empezó a insultar. Ella gritaba también y al final lloró" (page 38). The afternoon following Gloria's quarrel with Augustias because Gloria had come home late, Andrea said: ". . . me enseñó las señales de la paliza que le había dado Juan la noche antes y que empezaban a amoratarse en su cuerpo" (page 101).

Typical of the harrowing struggle between the two was one which took place because Juan believed Gloria was selling his paintings for too little money. Andrea said:

Me despertaron unos gritos pidiendo socorro. En seguida me di cuenta de que era Gloria la que gritaba y de que Juan le debería estar pegando una paliza bárbara . . . Ofamos dentro tacos, insultos. Carreras y tropezones con los muebles. El niño comenzó a llorar . . . De pronto se abrió la puerta . . . y Gloria salió despedida, medio desnuda y chillando. Juan . . . la arrastró al cuarto de baño . . . Juan metió a Gloria en la bañera y, sin quitarle las ropas, soltó la ducha helada sobre ella. Le agarraba brutalmente la cabeza, de modo que si abría la boca no tenía más remedio que tragar agua (page 120).

The quarrel ended by Juan declaring to Gloria ". . . y cualquier día te mataré como te vuelvas a meter con mis cuadros . . ." (page 124).

It is inconceivable that any woman would remain in the home in the circumstances in which Gloria lived, in constant conflict with her husband. The author, however, presents reasons for the conflict and why Gloria did not try to escape. Juan had married Gloria because she was pregnant, they had always lived in the mother's home in miserable surroundings and with Román, who taunted Juan for his failures and Gloria for loving him. Juan's feelings of inadequacy were more bitter because it was Gloria who made the living. With money she received from selling Juan's pictures to a junk dealer instead of an art dealer, as Juan believed, she said ". . . podía jugar por la noche en casa de mi hermano . . . Yo gano casi siempre . . ." (pages 218-219). Juan resented her ability and was consumed with jealousy and mistrust. Being the type of people

that they were and in the impoverished circumstances in which they lived, there was little hope of either bettering his situation without the other. When Juan, after Román's death, became so cruel and menacing he seemed insane, Gloria considered trying to put him in an asylum but her mixed emotions were true to life. To Andrea she said:

Y si siempre fuera malo, chico, yo le podría aborrecer y sería mejor. Pero a veces me acaricia, me pide perdón y se pone a llorar como un niño pequeño . . . Y yo ¿qué voy a hacer? (page 257).

Thus realistically, the author leaves this deep-seated marital conflict unchanged and without hope of solution.

During the months that Andrea had been in the home there had been nothing but antagonism, hatred, and quarreling between Juan and Román. Almost daily Román caused a scene at the dinner table by such remarks as one directed to Juan, "Hasta la imbécil de tu mujer se burla ya de ti, Juan; ten cuidado . . ." (page 42). On another occasion he said to Andrea:

¿Tú no te has dado cuenta de que yo los manejo a todos, de que dispongo de sus nervios, de sus pensamientos . . .? ¡Si yo te pudiera explicar que a veces estoy a punto de volver loco a Juan! (page 89).

It was clear to Andrea that Román took pleasure in belittling Juan, in provoking jealousy and distrust toward Gloria, and gloating, in a superior manner, over Juan's misery.

After Román's death, however, Juan was desperate with grief. According to Andrea ". . . aún nos faltaba oírle llorar. . . . Comprendí que Román tenía razón al decir que Juan era suyo. Ahora que él se había muerto, el dolor de Juan era impúdico, enloquecedor, como el de una mujer por su amante, como el de una madre joven por la muerte del primer hijo" (pages 248-249). Juan was never able to reconcile the loss of Román.

Andrea, in regard to her relationship with Juan said: "Yo no había entrado nunca en la habitación donde mi tío trabajaba, porque Juan me inspiraba cierto prevención" (page 43). Juan, however, seldom displayed antagonism toward Andrea. On one occasion it was provoked by Román, who pointed out to Juan Andrea's efforts to clean her room and said "¿No te gustaría tener una mujercita trabajadora como la sobrinita?" to which Juan replied "¡No sirve más que para hacer comedia y para querer humillar a los demás, para eso sirve y para juntarse contigo!" (page 179). Further provoked by Román, Juan continued, shouting: "--¡La sobrina! ¡Valiente ejemplo! . . . cargada de amantes, suelta por Barcelona como un perro . . ." (page 180). Realizing these accusations on the part of Juan were prompted by his extreme frustration and reaction to the taunts of Román, Andrea never made comment.

Andrea's relationship with Román was as disturbing as that with Augustias, and probably caused Andrea more anxiety. Her first conclusion when she witnessed him provoking a quarrel with Gloria was: "Creí que mi tío se había vuelto loco . . ." (page 38). In regard to her feeling for him, she said "Yo, honradamente, no me creía fascinada por Román, casi al contrario, a menudo le examinaba con frialdad. Pero las raras noches en que Román se volvía amable después de la cena, siempre borrascosa, y me invitaba: '¿Vienes, pequeña?', yo me sentía contenta" (page 45). But watching him in his room Andrea said ". . . me sentía muy lejos de él. La impresión de sentirme arrastrada por su simpatía, que tuve cuando me habló la primera vez, no volvió nunca" (page 47). Román seemed to Andrea to be a marvelous musician and of his music she said:

Iba hilando en la música una alegría tan fina que traspasaba los límites de la tristeza. La música aquella sin nombre . . . que nunca más he vuelto a oír. . . . A mí me llegaban en oleadas, primero ingenuos recuerdos, sueños, luchas, mi propio presente vacilante, y luego agudas alegrías, tristezas, desesperación, una crispación impotente de la vida y un anegarse en la nada (page 48).

However, when Juan stopped and asked Andrea what she thought of his music she said: "--Nada, no sé, sólo me gusta . . ." (page 48). She would not give him the satisfaction of admitting how much it affected her.

Andrea referred to Christmas as an unpleasant day ". . . quizá por el extraño estado de ánimo en que me dejó respecto a mi tío Román, al que no tuve más remedio que empezar a ver bajo un aspecto desagradable en extremo" (page 70). Andrea finally clashed openly with Román when she refused an invitation to his room and he replied: "-- Puedes hacer lo que quieras, Andrea. . . . no es cuestión de vida o muerte para mí." Andrea thought "Está desesperado . . . sin saber a ciencia cierta por que encontraba desesperación en su voz. El se marchó rápidamente . . ." Then she said: "Yo me sentía emocionada de una manera desagradable. . . . Hacía días que yo rehufa la afectuosidad de Román, me parecía imposible volver a sentirme amiga suya. . . . Pero aún me inspiraba el más interés que los demás de la casa juntos . . ." She concluded: "Es mezquino, es una persona innoble . . ." (pages 85-86).

Finally, Andrea did go to Román's room, but his actions were such that, "No sabía yo si gozaba asustándome o realmente estaba loco" (page 90) and it was after this experience that ". . . empezaba a sentir contra Román una repulsión indefinible" (page 91). Andrea's conflict with Román was intensified when her best friend Ena met him and they became interested in each other. Andrea missed the association with the girl but more than that, she feared for her safety with this man. Andrea's last encounter

with Román was when she interrupted a visit of Ena to his room, after eavesdropping on their conversation, because, she said:

No sé por qué me dió tanto miedo el tono amable y tenso de Román. . . . No sé qué desviación de mi fantasía me hizo pensar en su negra pistola, cuando el tío acentuaba su sonrisa. Fue una cuestión de segundos. Me abracé a él como una loca y le grité a Ena que corriese. Sentí el empujón de Román y vi su cara, limpia al fin de aquella tensión angustiada. Barrida por una cólera soberbia (page 229).

This final meeting between Andrea and Román brought to a most unsatisfactory close a relationship that had brought pleasure, at times, to Andrea's life in the dreary house. As she fled from him on one occasion she had thought, "A pesar de todo . . . Román hace vivir a las gentes de su alrededor" (page 195). She felt a kind of pity for him at times, because with his outstanding musical talent he had not achieved success nor had he ever been able to relate himself satisfactorily to anyone. After his death, Andrea missed him. She said:

Y no me parecía ya tan malo aquel hombre que sabía coger sus propios sollozos y comprimirlos en una belleza tan espesa como el oro antiguo . . . Entonces me acometía una nostalgia de Román, un deseo de su presencia que no había sentido nunca cuando él vivía (page 252).

Thus, as often happens in life, Andrea came to recall the pleasant things about this sadistic and tormented man and his evil ways faded from her memory--a conflict that death solved.

Interwoven in the author's presentation of the story of Román is the story of the love affair between him and the mother of Andrea's best friend, Ena. This relieves the tension created by the story of the bitter conflicts between members of the family and reveals more vividly the character of this neurotic man. It also affords the author a way of bringing into the story and dealing with the ever-present problem of a young girl in love with an older man, as Ena's mother was once with Román. True to his character, Román rejected the girl with a cruel and devastating remark. To prove her love for him he had asked her to cut her beautiful hair and give it to him. After she had sent it to Román he looked at her curiously and said:

Tengo lo mejor de ti en casa. Te he robado tu encanto . . . ¿Por qué has hecho esta estupidez, mujer? ¿Por qué eres como un perro para mí? (page 209).

Later Ena was able to avenge this treatment of her mother by seeking the acquaintance of Román, securing his true interest in her, and then confronting him with these words:

¿Qué pensabas? ¿Que me casaría contigo, quizá? ¿Que andaría azorada toda la vida, temiendo tus peticiones de dinero como mi madre? . . . Tengo todas las pruebas. Sabes que estás en mis manos. Por fin se acabará esta pesadilla . . . (page 228).

This solution of Román's conflict first with Ena's mother, then later with Ena, is quite idealistic. It could happen, of course, but it is not likely that true life would afford such a satisfaction.

Andrea's most satisfactory relationship during the year she spent in the house in Barcelona was with her friend Ena, an attractive and wealthy girl whom she met at the University. Yet Andrea was in conflict with Ena throughout the story as a result of Andrea's great need for the affection of this girl to compensate for the cold indifference of her family to her problems. When she spoke of her habit of studying with Ena and that ". . . la familia de Ena empezaba a considerarme como cosa suya." She said ". . . era aquella la época más feliz de mi vida . . ." (page 118). Ena reciprocated this affection and declared to Andrea "Y a ti también, queridísima . . . Tú eres mi hermana. De veras, Andrea . . ." (page 128). But there were times when Andrea became angry with Ena and she thought "No volveré a su casa." "Estoy harta de sus sonrisas de superioridad" (page 130). When Ena became interested in Román and told Andrea not to come to her house any more because she would not be there Andrea said, "La vida volvía ser solitaria para mí" (page 137). Added to the misery of her loneliness was Andrea's concern for Ena's welfare should she really become involved with Román. Her feelings for Ena were so strong that, when Gloria declared that Ena was "la amante" de Román, Andrea said:

Me puse tan encarnada que se asustó y se retiró de mí. . . . En aquel momento estaba aterrada por Ena. La quería y no podía soportar aquellas palabras corrosivas sobre su vida (page 224).

The conflict between Andrea and Ena was resolved after Andrea rescued Ena from Román's room. Andrea was so frightened and upset by Ena's actions that she ran out of the house and to the park, where Ena found her crying. There Ena assured Andrea of her friendship when she said, "¿Sabía que te quiero muchísimo, Andrea?" (page 232). Certainly the author gives the impression that Andrea's ability to endure the hardship, frustration, and lack of security within her family situation was contingent upon the satisfaction and security she gained from this relationship with Ena and with her family. Without it she probably could not have survived the ordeal.

Andrea's struggles with herself were frequent and bitter. In spite of all the beauty of the city in autumn she said ". . . sin embargo me envolvía la tristeza. Tenía ganas de apoyarme contra una pared con la cabeza entre los brazos, volver la espalda a todo y cerrar los ojos" (page 49). Under any circumstances a girl in Andrea's position would feel anxious and insecure. Andrea, however, was determined to make the best of it. When she realized that Román considered her different than the rest she said, "No me gustaba desilusionarle, porque vagamente yo me sentía inferior, un poco insulsa con mis sueños y mi carga de sentimentalismo, que ante aquella gente procuraba ocultar" (page 47). Andrea struggled to be the master of her fate

in the family circle and to find a place for herself among the university students, but she felt very much alone. On one occasion she said:

Estaba caminando como si recorriera el propio camino de mi vida, desierto. . . . Unos seres nacen por vivir, otros para trabajar, otros para mirar la vida. Yo tenfa un pequeño y ruin papel de espectadora. . . . Imposible libertarme (page 201).

This feeling of loneliness haunted Andrea for again she said, "Sentí dolor de soledad--más insoportable, por repetido. . . ." (page 231). Andrea's customary way of solving these struggles within herself was to rush out into the street and walk among the people or sit in the park where she said, "Estuve mucho rato llorando, allí, en la intimidad que me proporcionaba la indiferencia de la calle, y así me pareció que lentamente mi alma quedaba lavada" (page 202).

It was a fear to the point of an obsession with Andrea that she was becoming like her relatives. At times she identified herself with Juan for she said, "Pensaba en Juan y me encontraba semejante a él en muchas cosas. Ni siquiera se me ocurría pensar que estaba histérica por la falta de alimento" (page 130). Ena, on the other hand, said to her as she spoke of Román, "Tu tío es una personalidad. Sólo con la manera de mirar sabe decir lo que quiere. . . . parece algo trastornado a veces. Pero tú también, Andrea, lo pareces" (page 148).

On another occasion Ena had said to her: "Tú comes demasiado poco, Andrea, y estás histérica . . . ¿Por qué lloras si no estás histérica? . . . ¿Qué motivos tienes tú para llorar? . . ." (page 225). Then Andrea realized, "Yo hago gestos nerviosos como Juan . . . Ya me vuelvo loco yo también . . ." (page 225). This realization alarmed her. Only vaguely was she able to understand that torment and hunger could account for her outbursts of emotion. Her behavior was normal under the circumstances.

The author carries the story to a convenient and logical conclusion, and for the reader a satisfactory one. Andrea escaped the nightmare existence she had endured for a year by accepting an invitation from Ena to come to Madrid to work in the office of her father. Thus her conflicts against her family and its environment were solved and the reader feels she had survived the ordeal well. In her own words Andrea described her departure:

Bajé las escaleras, despacio. Sentía una viva emoción. Recordaba la terrible esperanza, el anhelo de vida con que las había subido por primera vez. Me marchaba ahora sin haber conocido nada de lo que confusamente esperaba: la vida en su plenitud, la alegría, el interés profundo, el amor. De la casa de la calle de Aribau no me llevada nada (page 260).

The story leaves the reader with the feeling, however, that Andrea did take with her wisdom gained from her experiences and the hope of a brighter future, with the determination to achieve it. She was not completely disillusioned, but

she left behind her absolute desolation and despair, a realistic conclusion.

Laforet's second novel, La isla y los demonios,⁴⁵ bears a striking resemblance to Nada in that the theme is essentially the same, the efforts of a young girl to escape her uncongenial surroundings and to assert her independence. As in Nada, her struggle to do this is primarily against members of her family, and the types of characters portrayed in this family and among her friends are quite similar to those of Nada. However, there is less physical violence in this novel, there is less tension between characters, and the emotional conflicts are not so bitter and overt. There is not the unrelieved bickering and brutality found in Nada. As previously mentioned, the Camino family in La isla y los demonios is wealthy and, therefore, the conflict between characters is not intensified by the poverty and squalor portrayed in Nada. The story takes place toward the close of the Civil War on the island of Gran Canaria. Although mention is made on several occasions of the suffering and hardships in Spain, as told by the relatives who fled the country and sought refuge on the island to live comfortably at the expense of their

⁴⁵Carmen Laforet, La isla y los demonios (Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1954), pp. 1-309.

family there, the conditions of war do not affect the events of this story. Rather, they occur within the peaceful and beautiful setting of this tropical island, which fact tends to relieve tension in the story.

Marta, the protagonist of the novel, is an intelligent and precocious adolescent of sixteen, two years younger than Andrea of Nada, who is oppressed by her neurotic and antagonistic family and is anxious to leave the island to live her own life. Marta lives with her unattractive half-brother José, his wife Pino, and her mother, Teresa. José suffers from an inferiority complex and emotional needs dating back to his unfortunate childhood, and compensates for his inadequacies by being domineering and brutal. Pino is cross-eyed, paranoid, hysterical, jealous, and a completely frustrated, unhappy woman. Marta's beautiful mother, Teresa, had become insane after losing her husband in an automobile accident when Marta was still a small child and is confined to her room. The family lives in the beautiful country home which had belonged to Marta's maternal grandparents and will belong to Marta after her mother's death.

The story begins with the arrival of Marta's relatives from Spain, refugees of the Civil War, a hypochondriac paternal uncle, Daniel, who, though he professes to be a talented musician, is an unemployed social snob who

accomplished nothing; his intelligent but puritanical and cold wife, Matilde, who has taught and has gained some recognition as a poetess; his sister, Marta's paternal aunt, Honesta, a giddy woman of forty or more who tries to pose as a demure and desirable debutante, who has carried on affairs with numerous men, and whose name scarcely fits her character. The only person whom Marta finds sympathetic is the relative's friend Pablo, a painter, who has accompanied the refugees from France to the island, and who becomes the somewhat unwilling confidant of Marta.

Other characters include Marta's friends, Sixto, a boy her age whom she had known through childhood, and several girl friends she knew at school, particularly Anita, who corresponds to some extent to Andrea's friend, Ena, in Nada. The only other character of importance is the servant Vicenta, a characteristic island type through whom the author describes the life and superstitions of the natives of the island. There is some similarity of character between Vicenta and Antonia, the servant in Nada, in that both are unswerving in their allegiance to the ones they love and both are formidable and mysterious.

The emotional conflicts in this story are due to unsatisfactory inter-personal relationships and do not involve environmental factors such as economic security or social position. The family enjoyed a comfortable and elevated place in the society of Las Palmas and only Pino

suffered because she felt she was not accepted by friends of the Camino family. The home surroundings, the beautiful garden filled with trees and flowers, the distant mountains, the interior of the house with all its beautiful furnishings, had remained unchanged since Marta's childhood and were pleasing to her. In the beauty of the garden she found solace in time of distress.

Marta quedó detrás, . . . Se fijó por primera vez en la casa donde había nacido . . . En el jardín crecían ya los crisantemos y seguían florecidas las dalias. Por las paredes del edificio trepaban heliotropos, madreselvas, bugambillas. Todos estaban en flor. Sus olores se mezclaban ardorosamente. Marta se sintió satisfecha de aquella belleza, de aquel lujoso desbordamiento (page 25).

On occasions of both extreme pleasure or distress Marta gave vent to her feelings through contact with the natural beauty of the island that surrounded her. On a morning when she felt especially happy because she anticipated a meeting with her friend Pablo, the author said:

Salí al jardín a correr cuesta arriba por la avenida de eucaliptos para descargar algo de esta dicha casi insufrible que la empapaba. . . . Marta se detuvo al fin con una silenciosa risa y vió a su alrededor el dorado mundo, . . . cruzó los brazos detrás de su cabeza y sintió lo que deben sentir los árboles en primavera, sólo una fuerza divina, . . . Como otras veces, Marta metió las manos en aquel agua para sentirla correr entre los dedos. . . . Marta, como todos los isleños, sentía pasión por el agua (page 124).

On another occasion when Pablo told her to leave him alone, that he had promised not to talk with her in the streets

again, Marta was desperate:

Imaginó que se tiraba al mar. Pero--el pensamiento la hizo sonreírse, mientras dos gruesas lágrimas le corrían al fin por las mejillas--, pero ella nadaría inmediatamente. Le gustaba con pasión nadar, sumergirse, deslizarse. . . . Huyó el pensamiento del suicidio sustituido por el más placentero de imaginarse a sí misma nadando en lucha contra los elementos (pages 155-156).

Later the author says that "Marta sintió una flojedad, un alivio, casi como una necesidad de sueño mirando al mar" (page 159). The child was suffering because of her infatuation for Pablo, who rejected her childish admiration and desire for his attention and understanding. She sublimated this desire by swimming daily with a friend, Sixto, and the author says: "Nadando no se cansaba nunca . . . Y quizá si ella no hubiera dado suelta así a tantas fuerzas . . . aquellas fuerzas la hubieran consumido (page 164).

Religion played no part in the story. Marta was in conflict, however, with the customs and mores of the islanders, who frowned on her aggressive behavior, her wandering alone on the streets, particularly to seek out Pablo, her daily swims with Sixto, and her display of affection for him in public. On one occasion Pablo said to her ". . . no se me ibana ver más hablando contigo por las calles, porque eso entre las gentes de tu ciudad, te perjudica" (page 154). In discussing the gossip about

Marta her friends said: "Pero tenemos que decirle algo. . . Esa calamidad no se da cuanta nunca de que todo el mundo la critica" (page 166). Actually Marta was not disturbed by this because she believed her actions were not wrong.

The most bitter and brutal conflicts that Marta experienced were between herself and her half-brother José and his wife Pino. When Marta's mother became emotionally ill, Marta had gone to live with her maternal grandfather. There her life had been happy. Upon his death she was placed in a convent where she remained for two years, until José married Pino, a native girl who was employed in the house as a nurse for Teresa. By this time Marta was studying for "el bachillerato". She was taken home to live with the newly married couple as a companion for Pino and to be near her mother. Neither José nor Pino accepted Marta, however, nor were they happy together, and so the home was not a pleasant one for Marta. The joy and tranquility she felt in the beauty of her surroundings were lost when she entered the house. The author said:

Pero Marta no estaba tranquila. Dentro de los muros de la casa esta placidez y tranquilidad desaparecian. Allí dentro no habia felicidad, ni comprensión, ni dulzura. . . . Pino y ella, que habian vivido indiferentes . . . durante algunas meses, se habian encontrado frente a frente. . . . Marta, habia sufrido entre los celos y la vulgaridad que escondian aquello muros (page 26).

According to Marta "José era un tipo aburrido, era un hombre vulgar . . ." (page 40) and ". . . siempre se sentía un poco asustada delante de José (page 44). This was not without cause because, although José ignored her presence most of the time, he punished her violently when she displeased him. This happened on one occasion when Marta prompted Pino to have a spell of hysteria by her announcement to her relatives, "Esta es la casa de mi madre ¿entienden? De mi madre y mía . . . Estamos muy contentas de tenerlos" (page 72). While Marta stood astounded, not knowing what to do about the situation she had created, "José la vió . . . y le soltó una palabrota, y luego dos bofetones sonoros. Le marcó los dedos en las mejillas" (page 73). Marta's misery was increased on this occasion by the fact that her relatives seemed to ignore the situation. The author said:

En aquellos segundos de pesadilla, notó que . . . Daniel y monesta se hacían los disimulados. A nadie le importaba que la castigaron . . . Dió media vuelta y salió al jardín. . . . Ella estaba absolutamente sola con Dios (pages 73-74).

She aroused José's anger on another occasion when she was telling him of her plan to study in Madrid after the war. José stopped reading his paper to say, "¡Ni que tú lo sueñes, vas a salir de la isla en tu vida! ¿Entiendes? . . . Tienes que ayudar a Pino a cuidar a tu madre. Y mientras ella viva, ¿me oyes? . . . ninguno de los tres salimos de aquí" (page 149).

The most violent scene in the novel occurred when José confronted Marta with the fact he had learned of her clandestine meetings with her friend Sixto and her affectionate conduct toward him in public. José seemed so angry that Marta wanted to flee but she was shaking so much from fright she could not move. The author said, "Marta descubrió que no podía hablar. . . . Le parecía que nunca había visto a José tan colérico. . . . Nunca estuvo tan desarmada delante de él. . . ." (page 174). José was prompted to action by Pino who shouted "Pero ¿no ves que es una . . .? ¡No eres hombre si no la matas!" (page 174). Marta, furious at this insult, said to Pino, "¡Tú no te metas!" Pino shrieked and José grabbed his sister ". . . por el cuello de la blusa y la tiró materialmente contra la pared." Because she was stunned, Marta seemed to smile and then "José perdió la cabeza y empezó a cruzarle la cara a bofetones (page 174). José was stunned by Marta's statement that she did not wish to marry Sixto. He replied, "Ni quieres ni puedes. Desde hoy se acabaron los estudios, las salidas; todas aquí dentro, . . . con Pino y con tu madre" (page 175). The scene ended by José locking Marta in her room to stay.

Marta was not so upset by her punishment, because she had always believed all sin had to be punished, but she sensed that, ". . . José no la castigó por eso" (page 175) and this disturbed her deeply. The blow on her cheek had

awakened in Marta the instinct to defend herself and to fight. Laforet wrote: "Supo que nadie la vencería a la fuerza bruta, jamás, jamás" (page 178). Marta felt that night that there was something strange in José's manner,

José esta noche tuvo en los ojos una frialdad, un odio. No podía pensar en aquello sin revolverse, sin aborrecerle también. Pero a ella no se le alcanzaba el por qué la noticia de un noviazgo suyo podía despertar en aquellos ojos tal aversión (page 178).

Insight into the cause of José's actions is given the reader at the close of the story when the author, in flashback style, tells something about the life experiences of the main characters. The life of José explains clearly his antagonistic attitude toward Marta and his rejection of her. José's mother died when he was a small boy. He was left to the care of his rather irresponsible and indifferent father, who made a fine appearance but lived in poverty and filth and neglected and ridiculed the boy. He married Teresa, Marta's mother, a beautiful and wealthy girl, as a matter of convenience. He considered her socially inferior and amused himself with other women. José, however, adored her because she was the first person who had shown him any kindness or attention and who had believed in him, "quizá la única". Therefore, the author said:

José se sintió desposeído cuando nació Marta. No era muy agradable ver a su madrastra extasiada con aquella muñeca, dándole el pecho y jugando con ella.

No era agradable tampoco pensar que a aquella niña, el día de mañana, le pertenecería todo lo que José disfrutaba como suyo: la casa, la finca (page 283).

To José "Las dos cosas más importantes de su vida fueron el encuentro con Teresa y el encuentro . . . con esta finca" (page 284). For José, Teresa had died long ago and this profound love for her ". . . se había ido convirtiendo en una máscara bajo lo que crecía la pasión por esta casa y el deseo de hacerla suya . . ." (page 284).

Hence José could not tolerate Marta, with whom he had had to share Teresa's love and to whom the property belonged. She was a threat to him, standing between him and what he loved, and he feared her. As he thought of this and his relationship with Marta he said to himself:

¡Este miedo es ridículo! Jamás hice nada de lo que tenga que arrepentirme. He ahorrado para comprar esto. . . . No le deseo ningún mal. No quiere meterla interna, ni mortificarla. A ella la finca no le importa. Quiere irse; esa es la prueba Tampoco quiere casarse. . . . Yo no soy inhumano (page 286).

José solved the conflict between himself and Marta to the satisfaction of both. Following the death of Teresa, Vicenta, her faithful servant openly accused Pino of poisoning Teresa and plotting to do the same to Marta. Taking advantage of this threat, which José actually did not believe, he proposed to Daniel that he take Marta back to Spain with him. To Daniel, José said:

La gente hablará. Si después de esto yo retengo a mi hermana conmigo, y por casualidad le diera a la chica por enfermar y morir, la vida se me haría imposible (page 288).

To Daniel's suggestion she return to the convent José replied: "Las gentes hablarían también. Por mí, no me importa, pero tengo que pensar en mi mujer . . . y en los hijos que más adelante tendremos" (page 289). Thus through José's selfish motive Marta was able to realize her one desire, to leave the island forever.

Pino was in conflict with Marta because she was jealous of her. She was jealous of Marta's wealth, her social position, her education, her friends, and that she had a purpose in life. The author described this conflict: "Estaba como afianzada en algo. Pino se lo notaba . . . Se ponía endemoniada contra ella. Llegaba a insultarla" (page 149). She was also jealous of Marta's freedom to come and go, a freedom that Pino was not allowed by José because she must be at home to care for Teresa. Pino resented what she considered Marta's air of superiority. Marta "tuvo un desesperado afán de pureza" (page 43) and had shunned Pino's companionship following her first experiences when she arrived from the convent. The author described these:

Pino la había conquistado durante unos días descubriéndole un mundo sucio, hirviente. Marta quería saber y había escuchado con avidez los secretos . . . Luego

Pino se había desbordado. Sus conversaciones parecían teñir a todas las personas que Marta conocía y quería de esta suciedad. Sus propias amigas, . . . habían sido metidas por Pino en estas conversaciones. Marta se encontró de pronto en una especie de fangal de confidencias diarias y de chismorreos con Pino, y se horrorizó de sí misma. . . . Pino, por su parte la persiguió con su aborrecimiento (pages 42-43).

Marta suffered as a result of her relationship with Pino but not because, "A su cuñada le gustaba mortificarla." It was not the words of Pino that bothered her but she suffered ". . . por no poder estar sola, por tener que contestar alguna vez . . . (page 182). Finally, Marta came to realize that Pino was overwhelmed with boredom, confined to that house with no interests, and that ". . . Pino por eso la miraba a ella con una grisácea envidia de la que ni siquiera se daba cuenta. Pino estaba enferma de envidia por todos y de todo" (page 185). Pino's antagonism against Marta had reached such a pitch that "Pino hubiera querido que José arrastrara a Marta por las cabelllos y le pegara una paliza tremenda. Marta le había oído gritar estas cosas sin inmutarse" (page 185). On another occasion ". . . en la voz de Pino vibraba un rencor apasionado. . ." as she declared to José that Marta should not be in "un buen colegio" but in a correctional school. Pino ended the quarrel with José by saying in Marta's presence, "Que me tienes aquí encerrada mientras otras se ríen . . . ¡Mira cómo se ríe ésta, mírala, que la mato!"

She jumped up and threw a knife across the dinner table at Marta's head but "La chica se agachó rápidamente y el cuchillo pasó por encima de ella" (page 186).

The conflict between Pino and Marta lessened as soon as José announced Marta's departure. Pino even took an interest in preparing Marta's wardrobe for the trip. However, when Marta asked if she might take something from the house, Pino immediately thought of Teresa's jewels and "Miró a su cuñada con rigidez, desconfiada". Marta, however, only wanted some of her father's books. This amazed Pino who "Siempre la creyó algo boba, pero no tanto como en aquel momento". Pino replied: "¿Y quién te lo impide?" (page 304). Marta realized that the books were to Pino the least valuable thing in the house. Marta had gained much understanding of Pino and as she observed her then she thought, ". . . Pino no se sentiría nunca feliz. Parecía no poder soportar las paredes de su casa y sin embargo sólo se preocupaba de las cosas que sucedían allí. Era como un animal cogido en una trampa" (page 304).

Marta was seldom aware of her mother except in times of dire distress, when she felt entirely rejected by her family. Once, after a violent scene with Pino, Marta stopped at her mother's door and for the first time felt grieved that she could not go in because "Nunca había sentido unas ganas tan grandes de echarse a llorar en los brazos de

alguien que fuese comprensivo y bueno" (page 45). In recent years she had thought very little about Teresa. As a child she had asked for her persistently but when ". . . la pusieron en su presencia lloró y pataleó, desesperada, diciendo que aquella mujer no era su madre" (page 242).

After Marta decided to leave the island, she began to think of her mother and went one night to her room to talk with her. She said to herself:

Es como si estuviera muerta. Nunca estuviste con ella. Nunca te necesitó . . . Ni la necesitaste desde que de jé de estar en tu vida. ¿Te habría entendido alguna vez? . . . (page 195).

Marta wondered what she would do if her mother opened her eyes and asked Marta to stay.

Pero Teresa no podía decir eso. No podía detenerla. Marta no era nadie, no se sentía atada a nadie, y eso le daba fuerza. Teresa la había abandonado hacía años más que se estuviera muerta (page 196).

When Marta's mother died, Marta was obsessed with the idea that the death was her mother's answer and that ". . . había llegado a su vida como un peso del cielo para hundirla y para detenerla en su fuga" (page 234). Marta gazed upon the body of her mother and was so upset when she could not cry that she prayed in anguish: "Dios mío que yo no sea un monstruo, que yo pueda llorar por mi madre; yo, que lloro por cualquier cosa insignificante" (page 238).

Marta's conflict over her relationship with her mother was finally resolved when Marta decided to remain on the island because, as she said to her mother, "No quiero hacer nada que tú consideras mal hecho" (page 242). After this decision she began to recall events in her childhood and an occasion when her mother had shielded her from punishment. Then she knew that ". . . su madre era amiga suya, complice suya, contra su padre y contra todos . . . No, su madre no le habria impedido nunca que realizarse sus deseos. La habria ayudado como nadie" (page 243). At last she was able to cry. She realized now that "En verdad, los muertos no nos abandonan tanto como suelen hacerlo los seres vivos. . . . Ahora mismo, a Marta, alucinada, le parecia sentir aquella compafia y aquella perdida y olvidada complicidad" (page 243).

Marta did not remember her father but she identified herself with him. One day when she asked her grandfather about him he had said: "No debes hacer caso cuando te digan que tu padre fue un mal hombre y un gandul . . . Era un poco desgraciado . . . Era un tipo algo bohemio y vagabundo . . . Siempre tiene ganas de marcharse" (page 31). Marta was convinced that she was like her father, that ". . . algo de vagabunda tenia ella. Siempre soñaba con ver paises lejanos" (page 31). Marta did not feel the lack of

a father but she did treasure his books and these were the only things she took with her when she left home.

The relationship that caused Marta the most pain and anguish was with Pablo, whom she worshipped as a saint but who considered her the adolescent child that she was and refused to take seriously her adoration of him. Marta's devotion to Pablo was prompted by the interest he showed in the stories she had written about the legends of the island, "de demonios con patas de cabras." Marta was overwhelmed when he said, "Me gusta mucho. . . . Te haré un dibujo de tus demonios." Carmen Laforet wrote that "Ante esta desusada dulzura, Marta tuvo ganas de llorar" (page 91). After this conversation Marta thought of Pablo, the painter, ". . . como el único amigo posible. . . . la chica sentía hacia aquel hombre un extraño respeto. Cuando sentía por casualidad su nombre empezaba a latirle el corazón . . ." (pages 109-110). Because Marta enjoyed the attention and interest Pablo showed her, she began to go daily to the area where she might meet him. Of Pablo the author said, "A Pablo le gustó hablar con la niña en estas ocasiones. Nunca había encontrado un oyente más atento. A veces se sentaban juntos en un banco . . ." (page 120). It was Pablo who encouraged Marta's desire to leave the island for he had said to her, "Tú debías salir de la isla. No estás hecha para estar metida entre

cuatro paredes. Tú tienes algo de vagabunda" (pages 120-121). To Marta the things that Pablo said to her ". . . le sonaban como una música extraña . . ." but Pablo did not know that ". . . aquellas conversaciones parecían abrirle puertas, mundos" (page 123). Neither did Pablo realize the significance of the child's words to him, "Nadie en el mundo, nadie, es tan amiga suya como yo . . ." (page 140) nor her statement, "Nunca . . . nunca le he querido tanto como esta noche. Nunca, ni cuando me enamore, querré a nadie tanto como a usted." To these words Pablo replied: "Te deseo que no te enamores nunca, hija. Tener quince años y ser como tú . . ." (page 144).

After this pleasant relationship Marta was stunned at the reception Pablo gave her when she went to his house to see him. Although the girl smiled when she met him, ". . . la voz de Pablo resultaba tan molesta y tan seca que no parecía suya" as he said to her "¡Vaya! . . . Esto es como un atraco, ¿no? . . . Veo que no tienes mucho que estudiar" (page 153). When Marta asked if she bothered him she noted, as he raised his eyes, "Allá muy adentro lucía algo. Una chispita cariñosa. Pero muy lejana." However, Pablo admonished her "No debes venir por aquí a buscarme" (page 153). Pablo seemed exasperated at her question, "Y . . . ¿todo aquello de nuestra amistad? . . ." and he replied:

Hija, compréndelo . . . Yo no tengo tu edad . . . No me hagas más imbécil aún de lo que soy . . . Tú, a tus cosas . . . A tus amistades . . . Siento decirte esto así, pero no es posible que continuamente te encuentre delante de mí . . . ¡Vaya, adiós! (pages 153-154).

Marta proudly replied, "Siento haberle molestado . . . No volverá a suceder" (page 154), but the girl was so upset and frustrated she wished she were dead. Laforet wrote:

Si es verdad que un día la había considerado como mujer fuerte, como amiga, hoy era sólo una niña molesta. . . ¡Ojalá la matara alguien y Pablo recibiera horrorizado y pálido la noticia! (page 155).

For weeks after this Marta avoided meeting Pablo. She was surprised that "El sufrimiento ni le había dado fiebre, ni había alterado su organismo en lo más mínimo." Like all hopeful and long-suffering adolescents, she thought that through this experience she had grown into a woman and that "Algún día Pablo lo entendería, y quizá buscara su amistad . . ." (page 163).

It was Marta, however, who finally sought Pablo because she wanted his help in arranging to leave the island with her relatives. She thought, "Únicamente él, en el mundo, podía tenderle una mano . . ." In the absence of her relatives, she decided they had gone to visit Pablo and, determined to follow, she set out alone by bus to a far corner of the island to find him ". . . porque nada es difícil cuando se desea de veras . . . y eso el mismo Pablo se lo había dicho . . ." (page 199). Pablo was

astounded to see her but not angry when he said, "Te debe haber pasado algo muy grave. Esto es una locura." To this Marta replied, "Pero, aunque me cueste un disgusto, no me importa nada. Me parece que nunca he sido tan feliz como ahora" (page 206). Pablo did not realize as he derided Marta about her behavior, "como una mujercuela vulgar", that Marta felt pleasure in his words because ". . . quien castiga así de palabra no tiene indiferencia . . ." (page 211). To Marta Pablo said, "Tengo miedo por ti porque eres una chiquilla loca . . . No sé lo que esperas encontrar en el mundo" (page 217). However, Pablo accompanied Marta back to the home of her relatives and, in spite of his exasperation concerning her behavior, managed to convince them to give José the impression Marta had spent the weekend with them. In his argument he said:

Tú sabes que José aprovecharía cualquier ocasión para encerrar a su hermana. Tú misma has comentado que ese hombre quiere tener a la niña bien cogida, y que de ninguna manera permitirá que se case hasta que él la haya despojado de su fortuna . . . (page 221).

After this display of friendship and concern, Pablo departed with these words:

No me des las gracias. Hacía tiempo que no me divertía tanto . . . Ah, te voy a decir una cosa. Estos días no se te ocurra venir a verme. No conviene. Pero si logras tus planes, ya sabes . . . (pages 222-223).

These were the last words spoken between Pablo and Marta. That night Marta's mother died. It was then that "Marta

supo . . . , se atrevió a saberlo, que no era otra cosa que amor el sentimiento que la llenaba cuando el nombre de Pablo le hacía arder . . ." (page 291). She believed it was because Pablo was so reserved, so superior, so strong, that he had rejected her friendship. Typical of her youth she thought:

Nunca . . . podría querer a ninguna otra persona de esta manera. No es posible que un sentimiento tan grande, sin base alguna de realidad, se de dos veces en la vida (page 292).

Marta's idealist dream vanished when she saw, through her window, Honesta and Pablo in the garden. "Lo que ellos hacían le hizo perder de un golpe todas sus ideas sobre el pudor y la decencia" (page 295). The author wrote:

Más tarde, empezó a sufrir . . . no de celos, ni de envidia, porque su cuerpo era demasiado joven y su amor por Pablo demasiado espiritual, demasiado lleno de idealismo para eso. Empezó a sufrir de asco (page 295).

She realized that Pablo considered her a child, nothing more. It seemed to Marta she would always suffer because "Era demasiado joven para saber la existencia piadosa, implacable y segura, del olvido" (page 299). When she learned that Pablo had left the island without seeing her, "Aunque a ella misma le pareciese imposible, este hecho la conmovió poco; porque estaba como sumergida en la fiebre de los preparados para su propia marcha . . ." (page 301). Thus the conflict resulting from the love and adoration of a young girl for the older man who befriended her was resolved in a true-to-life fashion.

Marta's relationship with her relatives was not very satisfactory. She had looked forward with great expectation to their arrival and was deeply disappointed and hurt when they had no time for her and were not interested in meeting her friends, to whom she had boasted about them. She had hoped that Matilde, as a writer, would be interested in her writings but "Cuando pensaba en la manera como Matilde la habia rechazado, hasta tenia ganas de llorar" (page 69). The child irritated Matilde, who said to her when Marta asked Matilde to look at her writings, ". . . no quiero leer tus cosas. No sé si tienes talento o no. Lo más probable será que no lo tengas; . . . Me repugna verte todo el día sin hacer nada más que pensar en ti misma" (page 70). The first indication that this relationship was improving was Matilde's act of kindness when she did not reveal to José that Marta had taken the trip alone to see Pablo. Later she helped Marta finish her schoolwork and study for examinations. Like Marta, she was anxious to go to Spain. The author also noted that:

Matilde, desde que se enteró que su sobrina iba con ellas, empezaba a tomar con Marta un aire autoritario. A la niña esto la asombraba un poco, pero se dejaba dominar pasivamente . . . (page 302).

As more interest was shown in her, Marta was gradually becoming less defiant and she was learning the art of getting along with others.

Marta's relationship with Honesta was less satisfactory than with Matilde. Marta thought that Honesta "era afectadísima" and that she was ridiculous when she said to Marta, "Vamos a ser muy amiguitas, ¿eh? . . . En medio de todo somos las únicas chicas solteras de la casa. ¿No te parece?" (page 55). Marta soon learned that "Honesta hablaba por hablar" and she wondered what her friends would think of her. She knew: "Se reirían un poco" (page 56). Marta preferred to read rather than talk with Honesta and when Honesta followed her ". . . para seguir hablando de sí misma, de enamorados . . . y mil bobadas contadas con muy poco gracia, Marta tuvo ganas de bostezar o de taparle la boca" (page 56). Marta began to feel a deep antipathy toward her aunt. As Marta was dancing with a friend during a party she "Sintió un ligero placer sádico al ver que Hones . . . [sic] envejecida por el contraste con la panda de muchachas, la miraba" (page 89). On the night of her mother's death, as Marta observed Honesta come into the room "Aquel aire despreocupado y prosaico de Honesta en aquella noche, entre aquellas velas, . . . tenía algo de fúnebre, de mal gusto. Algo que a Marta le produjo náuseas" (page 244). After seeing Honesta in the garden with Pablo, Marta's reactions to the woman became more violent. As Honesta embraced her when she came to her room before Teresa's funeral:

Marta sintió un dolor agudo, irracional, que le hizo asomar lágrimas a los ojos . . . Entonces ella notó una rabia ciega, irrefrenable que la envolvía . . . Hubiera matado a Honesta. . . . Y como en una especie de pataleta le pisoteó los pies con sus sandalias (page 297).

Moments later she wondered if her action had been just and if she would have done this to Pablo. She realized that what she had seen the night before between Honesta and Pablo had "branded her like a hot iron", that all her ideals in life which she had struggled to obtain had been consumed as in flames and she thought, "Nunca volvería a ser la criatura ciega y feliz de antes, después de haber sido mordida por los demonios" (page 298). Through Honesta she had learned that Pablo was no more an extraordinary being than Daniel or José and yet she was able to defend him against Honesta, whom she despised.

Daniel was the only relative who displayed any sympathy toward Marta. This uncle was the one who told her the family had discovered she was wandering the streets of the city alone and had been swimming daily with her friend Sixto but, Daniel said, "Yo estoy de tu parte Puedes abrirme tu pecho como a un confesor. Yo también he pecado mucho" (page 170). He did not protest Matilde's action in protecting Marta against José nor did he refuse the responsibility of taking her to Spain. Since Daniel was impressed by social prestige, the fact that Marta had

money no doubt swayed his decision and made her more acceptable to him as a future responsibility.

Marta's relationship with her friends was very satisfactory. The author said that "Marta no concebía la vida sin consultar sus preocupaciones a la panda de amigas. Se sentía unida a ellas mucho más que a su familia" (pages 66-67). Her friends were also loyal to her, particularly her best friend, Anita. To those who were discussing the criticism of Marta's behavior, Anita said:

Una mujer no besa a un hombre nunca sin estar enamorada. No va a perder así su dignidad. ¡Qué tontería! Claro que está enamorada. Ella conoce a Sixto de toda la vida (page 167).

At that moment Marta thought that ". . . en verdad lo extraordinario y lo irreal eran ellas, sus amigas, su dulce buena fe . . ." (page 168). Marta realized that she had been granted ". . . este regalo de la vida que es la amistad" (page 166).

Sixto, Marta's only boy friend in the story, served to ease the pain of rejection by Pablo. "Era muy consolador también saber que ella, a Sixto, le gustaba un poco" (page 160). Whenever she was obsessed with thoughts of Pablo ". . . opuso como muro la imagen limpia y sonriente de Sixto . . ." (page 161). But Marta never loved Sixto, as she declared to both José and Pablo. After José forbade her to see Sixto again, Marta agreed, and this caused her

no concern. However, Marta had feelings of guilt when Sixto came to the school looking for her and she responded to his expressions of love and concern by saying, "Si mi hermano me ve contigo, me mata . . ." (page 239). She did not want to think she had behaved badly toward him and she thought to herself that, "Hubiera sido mucho más cómodo que él se hubiera olvidado, como ella, . . ." (page 240). Marta felt remorse for her treatment of Sixto.

As the above conflicts with her family and with Pablo indicate, Marta was in constant conflict with herself. Often she felt there were two Martas, one trying to control the impulsive behavior of the other. As previously indicated, Marta felt very much alone. She knew this about herself:

Si había una persona destinada a correr por el mundo, ésa era ella. . . . Las mayores alegrías, las mayores penas que había tenido en su corta vida, las había pasado en soledad. Recordó sus vagabundeos, por las calles de Las Palmas . . . y recordó una noche con luna, cuando ella se bañaba sola, en el mar. La soledad no le daba miedo. Ni lo desconocido (pages 305-306).

Marta was determined to leave the island and certain she would not return because she knew that ". . . ella no era de los personas que vuelven la vista atrás" (page 305). Because she did not want to begin her new life burdened with old memories, she decided to burn all of her childhood writings. She revealed mixed emotions concerning her

departure, however, when she saved the legends of Alcorah, the spirit of the island. As she walked along the familiar garden paths in the beauty of the twilight, she suddenly realized she did not need to keep the legends to remember that beautiful island,

Todos aquellos caminos, hartos de soportar el peso de sus sandalias, estaban dentro de su alma. La silueta de la cumbre, y el silencio de los barrancos, el mar y las playas, humedecerían siempre el latido de su sangre. Dondequiera que fuese, la isla iría con ella (page 309).

Marta not only achieved her desire to free herself from the boundaries of the island and the authority of her half-brother, but she was able to solve to her satisfaction the conflict she felt in her relationship with Pablo, and to surmount the pain and disillusionment she suffered because of him. As a result of this experience, she developed knowledge and understanding of herself, she was able to resolve the conflict between the two Martas, and with self-assurance and anticipation she faced her departure for places unknown. Thus the author concluded this novel, as she did Nada, on a hopeful note.

There were other conflicts presented by the author as the result of unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships between the members of the family. As previously indicated José, with his feelings of inferiority because of an unsatisfactory relationship with his father, sought to compensate

by a domineering manner toward everyone and particularly toward Pino, whom he really loved. However, because of his attachment to Teresa, which through the years he had transferred to love of the house and its surroundings, he had been unable to free himself to show compassion toward anyone.

Pino felt socially inferior to the Camino family, she was consumed with jealousy, especially of her husband's loyalty toward Teresa above everyone else; and she was bored, justifiably, by her lonely existence in the country home where she was shut up with only the servants and the mentally ill woman. She was in conflict with everything and everybody, she had no satisfactions in life; and, as a result, she was a hysterical and truly emotionally ill woman.

Between Daniel and Matilde there was marital discord. Daniel considered himself socially superior and because of this and his feelings of inferiority due to his unsuccessful career, he had dominated and degraded Matilde. This created a bitterness in her which lessened as she was able to return to a life of activity on the island, outside the domineering atmosphere of Daniel's snobbish family. Daniel also improved as he enjoyed success in performing a job in José's office.

Honesta was a frustrated and stupid woman who led a useless existence, and compensated for her unsatisfactory life by carrying on one illicit love affair after another. Matilde was ashamed of her sister-in-law and Honesta considered Matilde common and inferior. Honesta remained frustrated and spiteful to the end.

Aside from the story of Marta's struggle for independence the novel includes the story of the servant, Vicenta, who had come to the island a bitter and lonely woman. She had fled from another of the Canary Islands, after her husband had deserted her, her favorite daughter had been murdered, and her remaining daughter had asked her to leave because it was believed she was practicing witchcraft. The difficult life of the natives of the island is described vividly through the story of Vicenta. Vicenta had transferred her love and allegiance for her young daughter to Teresa and had guarded Teresa carefully through the early days of her marriage and during her long illness. However, Vicenta was looked upon with suspicion by all the household, she was in constant conflict in her relationship with all members of the family, and after the death of Teresa, she walked out of the house forever. She had never enjoyed approval, respect, or appreciation after Teresa's illness.

In Pablo the author describes the struggle of a moderately successful artist to decide between success as a painter and the satisfaction of being with the wife that he loved. Pablo's greatest conflict was with himself because he had no respect for himself as a man. In the end the reader is given the impression he went to join his wife, Marfa, because life was unbearable without her. His character adds interest to the story because of the contrasting philosophy of life that, through him, the author presented to Marta.

In this book, through her diverse characters and their circumstances, Carmen Laforet has woven a presentation of the conflicts produced within a family or a circle of friends because of misunderstanding, frustration, selfishness, envy, and indifference that lead to unsatisfactory inter-personal relationships. She brings out clearly the fact that people are the product of their experiences. The reader is left with the sharp impression that more than any other dissatisfaction with one's environment, lack of satisfactory relationships with family and friends can be most devastating.

The title of the novel, La mujer nueva,⁴⁶ was taken from a Biblical passage written by Saint Paul in a letter

⁴⁶Carmen Laforet, La mujer nueva (Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1960), pp. 1-291.

to the Galatians "Porque respecto de Jesucristo ni la circuncisión ni la incircuncisión valen nada, sino el hombre nuevo . . ." (Galatians 6:15). However, typical of Carmen Laforet's writings the main character is a woman, Paulina, the product of a broken childhood home, as was Andrea in Nada and Marta in La isla y los demonios, who had been living a tormented and miserable existence for the past year in the home of her mother-in-law, Mariana, with her husband, Eulogio, and her ten-year-old son, Miguel. Other characters in the book include Antonio Nives, the second cousin of Eulogio, his beautiful but ailing wife Rita, and Rita's mother, Blanca, la condesa de los Vados.

The main theme of the novel is the struggle of Paulina with herself to reach a decision as to what course her life should follow. Should she remain with her estranged husband and assume her duties as a wife and mother, or should she follow the dictates of her heart and go away with Antonio, a married man eight years younger than she, with whom she was madly and passionately in love and with whom she had been having an affair. Religion played an important part in this book. Paulina's struggle with herself involved a struggle with the beliefs of the Catholic church and the reader is led to believe that her decision is reached not through the desires of the woman, who in the first part of the book followed her own convictions and

considered these a sufficient guide, but because of the conversion of this woman to the Catholic faith, which in the last part of the story brought forth "la mujer nueva".

Paulina's struggle with herself involved feelings of extreme loneliness and the need for the security that love and affection would give her. Laforet again presents the effect of marital discord on the life of a child. She pictured Paulina as an unhappy and frightened girl in the home of her father, don Pedro Goya, an uncouth and drunken mining-engineer, and her pious, ever-suffering, and weeping mother, Isabel. Don Pedro carried on extra-marital affairs and paid no attention to his family and Paulina's mother consoled herself by spending her days at the church in prayer, neglecting care of the home and her child. She always wore black and thus:

Paulina empezó a relacionar el sentido religioso de la vida como un especie de amor a colores oscuros, a olor sucio, a carnes enfermas y blancas cubiertas de ropas espesas que las privan del beneficio del sol. . . . empezó a aborrecer a los curas que aconsejaban a su madre resignación y daban grandes palmadas en el hombre de su padre y comían arroz los domingos en su casa . . ." (page 53).

Paulina's memories of her unhappy childhood were closely related to the church because of her mother's devotion to it; and, as a result:

Para Paulina, la iglesia llegó a ser la excusa de todos los males de la patria, de todos los gamberrismos de los hombres . . . ; algo viejo, corrompido y malo, contra lo cual su juventud quería luchar (page 57).

Paulina also had buried deep within her all the emotions she had felt in regard to her parents and their relationship. This greatly affected her conflict with herself in regard to the effect her conduct would have on her child. Paulina said that she was never able to tell anyone:

. . . el sufrimiento que habia sentido en las noches de sus cinco años, despertándose en la obscuridad de su cuarto porque su padre insultaba a su madre, que lloraba en la habitación de al lado. No le explicó cómo se ponía ella de rodillas en su cama, rezando a Dios para que los padres se reconcillasen y fuesen buenos y hubiese alegría en casa para siempre jamás . . . (page 43).

In these lines the author described vividly and realistically the bitter longings of a disturbed and frightened child for the security of love. Because of frequent moving and the home situation, Paulina spent most of her girlhood with her maternal grandmother, Bel, in Madrid. This was a happy situation from which she dreaded to go to spend vacations with her parents. The author said, "Paulina fue creciendo con la idea obsesiva de ser absolutamente lo contrario de lo que habian sido sus padres." and that, in regard to her father, "Si este odio no se encontró más, fue porque Paulina vivía en Madrid y porque su padre le permitía estudiar en el Instituto y luego en la Universidad . . ." (page 56).

Paulina loved her grandmother who, the author said, "Era la persona de su familia que más habia mimado a

Paulina. La que se habia preocupado por ella con un interés ansioso. . . . La abuela ocultó al padre de Paulina . . . el largo noviazgo de Paulina". This relationship between these two seemed true to life, as did the grandmother's explanation to the girl, "A los hombres como tu padre no hay más remedio que mentirles" (pages 40-41).

In addition to this satisfactory relationship with her grandmother, Paulina was popular and had many friends. The grandmother was concerned, however, about Paulina, who at fifteen was, "Una ohica nada guapa y que atrae como moscones a todos los niños de su mismo curso. . . . Coqueta como el demonio. Amiga de trapos, alegre, desparpajada". It bothered her because of her . . . frías relaciones con las chicas" (page 40). This did not bother Paulina, who said, "Green que les quito los novios, tienen celos" (page 40), a realistic conclusion.

During the Civil War, when Paulina was left alone in the city, apart from relatives, she was able to make friends who continued to seek her company years later, but it was a surprise to her that they enjoyed her presence without expecting anything of her. Paulina did not know why, ". . . le costaba tanto creer que la gente pudiese quererla. Sin embargo, reflexionó, sólo una vez en su vida habia quedado defraudada en su cariño . . ."

(page 280), and that was with Eulogio, who, nevertheless did not want a separation. This lack of confidence in herself seemed the logical result of the terrific disappointment and pain she experienced in her relationship with her husband after he had returned from the war.

Paulina's horrible life during the summers she spent in Villa de Robre, the mining village where her parent's lived, was complicated by the fact she had no friends there because mining families were not accepted, for they were "gente de paso". From the balcony of her parents' home she watched the life of the family next door and came to worship as a "especie de ídolo", Mariana Nives, the wife of the owner of a factory, an attractive and efficient woman whose image she opposed to that of her mother. It was her relationship with this woman and her son, Eulogio, that was the devastating and driving force of Paulina's life.

Paulina met Eulogio Niven on the train to Villa de Robre and when he took her hand:

Cambiaron una corriente de magnetismo tan profundo, que a Paulina le parecia que algo la sacaba de ella misma, la absorbía, la anegaba. . . . Había recibido en su vida centenares de besos y era la primera vez que la besaban, que besaba (page 57).

That was the beginning of what Paulina described as "Aquella locura . . . obscura felicidad . . .," a feeling which

during the last year Paulina had forgotten. "En el último año se había convertido en polvo, pero estuvo vivo, ardiendo, en ella y en Eulogio, en los dos" (page 69). Paulina did not realize that at that time Eulogio ". . . tenía la cabeza torturada porque su cerebro, acostumbrado al orden y a una seria disciplina, le estaba diciendo que no podía dejarse ir con aquella muchacha, a la que amaba, pero con la que jamás se casaría" (page 71).

This problem was solved within a few weeks when the Civil War began and Eulogio went into the service as an assistant to his uncle in Barcelona. Paulina's father had been shot as a political prisoner, her mother was dead, and Paulina was alone in the house. Eulogio took her with him, and later they were married by military officials. The satisfaction of this relationship was vividly expressed when Eulogio said, "--Nunca más podría estar con una mujer después de haber estado contigo" to which Paulina replied "--Yo sé una cosa sola: sé que no me importaría morir, después de esta felicidad" (page 78). Paulina followed him, living in accommodations found in villages, of which the author said "El único hogar que Paulina recordaba como suyo en toda su vida fue aquella casita de San Gervasio" (page 81). After Eulogio fled to France and on to South America, Paulina was renounced by her landladies and was put in prison, where Miguel was

born. For ten years Paulina struggled to support herself and Miguel, with little help from her mother-in-law until Eulogio returned. Then began the most torturous existence of Paulina's life. Eulogio returned much different from the man she loved. She said:

La vida en común casi desde el momento en que Eulogio abandonó su avión en Barajas y fue acercándose al grupo de personas . . . que le esperaban . . . Casi desde el momento en que él abrazó a Mariana, y levantó del suelo, en un alarde, a Miguel, y sólo unos minutos más tarde se volvió para encontrar los ojos asustados de Paulina, sí, desde ese arranque todo fue difícil (page 116).

Paulina was crushed by Eulogio's lack of desire for her above all others, a natural reaction, and added to this she was hurt by his tone of voice when he spoke to her, and the fact that, as she said:

Disponía los menores detalles sin consultar en absoluto la opinión de Paulina. . . . Cambió de colegio a Miguel; criticó su educación. Desautorizó a Paulina delante del chico (page 117).

This would have been difficult for any woman, but it was especially so for Paulina because she had had complete authority over the boy since his birth, she had provided for him, and she was used to making decisions. Added to this was the deep hurt she felt at this display of lack of appreciation for what she had done, and lack of consideration and love for her. In this conflict between Eulogio and Paulina the author described a situation that has existed between thousands of couples following any war.

Paulina's reaction was normal, ". . . con los nervios desatados, llevó las de perder. Gritaba. . . ." (page 117). To all this Eulogio shrugged his shoulders and said "Cosas de mujeres." Naturally, his reaction was passed on to his son who would repeat "Cosas de mujeres . . . No hagas caso, padre" (page 117).

This loss of devotion from her son as well as her husband was more than Paulina could bear. When Eulogio asked her to be married in the church, she refused. Because they were expecting another child and Paulina was not well, the family moved to the home of Mariana in Villa de Robre. Following the birth of the child, who died, Paulina became gravely ill. After that time Eulogio had not insisted on the marriage but had said: "No quiero forzarte; piénsalo" . . . and Paulina thought, "Si alguna vez me case, . . . no será contigo, amiguito . . ." (page 117).

It was from this situation, which included Mariana's disapproval of her, that Paulina was fleeing when the story opened. She said, "Es terrible sentirse sujeta a un hombre que la trata a una como si una fuese alguien sin ni siquiera uso de razón . . ." (page 188). Eulogio agreed to her departure to live alone in Madrid while she decided whether she wished to marry in the church and live with him for the sake of their son. When, later, Paulina

told him she had decided not to return because, "Es peor vivir con padres mal avenidos . . . Además, yo me conozco. No soporto el campo", Eulogio replied firmly, "Yo he vuelto a ti, por mi hijo." The basis of Paulina's conflict is truly revealed when she replied "Yo te esperé a ti por ti mismo, si quieres saberlo" (page 212).

Complicating the conflict between Eulogio and Paulina, and particularly Paulina with herself, was the fact Paulina was not sure the marriage had been registered and if not, she was a free woman. If she were free, she would be relieved of some of the guilt she felt over her affair with Antonio. Eulogio finally told her he had not been frank with her, that he had been afraid to tell her he had discovered the marriage was not recorded, and that she was free. After this admission Paulina wanted to confess to him that in losing her, he was not losing "Una joya" and she said, "No he sido tan intachable como tú crees" (page 213). Eulogio stopped her confession. His words revealed clearly his position in the matter and why Paulina, a woman who all her life had been starved for love, could not bring herself to return to him and therefore had encouraged him to find another wife. Eulogio said:

Paulina . . . no sé por lo que tú valgas o dejes de valer, por lo que quiero casarme contigo. Es porque eres la madre de mi hijo, y porque, aparte de cualquiera

locura o debilidad, eres una mujer que se ha sacrificado por mi hijo. Y ninguna mujer que yo metiese en casa, ninguna podría substituirte a ti, junto a nuestro chico. Es por eso . . . , simplemente por eso . . . (page 214).

When Paulina began to cry, Eulogio watched her coldly. Eulogio further expressed his attitude by replying to her suggestion that there were other women who could make him happy:

No seas tonta, Paulina. Las mujeres os creéis siempre lo principal del universo. Sin mujer también puede vivir un hombre muy a gusto (page 217).

To this he added "--Ya sabes que espero, Paulina."

Paulina's struggle with herself and against Eulogio was intensified by her "conversion" on the train, when she fled to Madrid, because in spite of all her study, prayer, confession, and conference with members of the clergy, it was not clear to her what was the "task" that should be her's to accept. Even after Paulina rejected the love of Antonio, free to marry after his wife died, she was tormented with longing for direction and knowledge "of the will of God". Her answer came when early one morning she went to the church to pray and witnessed there the marriage of an elderly couple. As she heard the words of the marriage vows "Para siempre", she knew that "Ella también se había dado así. No como en una aventura, sino para toda la vida" (page 286). Then this thought came to her:

No importaba que sus impulsos egofistas hacia Eulogio hubiesen terminado. No importaba que le horrizase mucho más la idea de vivir con él en el campo . . . No importa nada. Dios le daría la gracia necesaria para seguir su camino, porque ella era la mujer de Eulogio . . . (page 286).

Although it is certain that Paulina's decision to return to the country to live with Eulogio was influenced by her feelings for her son Miguel, the author makes it quite clear that this was not the real basis for her decision. When Paulina suddenly decided to return to Madrid, Eulogio remembered that "Paulina ni siquiera había esperado el regreso de Miguel . . . En la última temporada, ni su hijo parecía importarle. Sin embargo, había vivido dedicado al niño durante diez años" (page 15). This perplexed Eulogio. Later Antonio questioned her about her plans for Miguel because she had declared that, regardless of Miguel, she would go away with him, and Paulina said, "Si tú quieres, nada me importa", and she continued:

No le perderé del todo . . . Estoy bien segura de que para los hijos es mejor una separación amistosa que unos padres que no se quieren, amargándose la vida (page 59).

This was a logical conclusion for a woman whose childhood had been miserable because of the marital discord in the home.

Later Paulina wrote to Eulogio to come for her saying, "Tal como lo veía aquella mujer nueva en que ella se

había ido convirtiendo por su amor a Cristo" (page 287).
 When he arrived and greeted her with a smile, ". . . tuvo la seguridad de que su vida al lado de aquel hombre podía ser profundamente buena" (page 290) and, as she left with him, Carmen Laforet notes:

Paulina empezó a notar en ella un gran confianza. Y una gran paz. La paz de haber empezado, al fin, su camino y de andar en espíritu y en verdad. Esa paz de Cristo que supera todo sentido y que la envolvía enteramente, cuando regresaron hacia la casa (page 291).

Typical of the author, the story ends on a happy note and the reader is left with the impression that, for Paulina, the future will be a happy one.

In the midst of her extreme confusion concerning her religious beliefs and her destiny, during which time she was completely distraught, Paulina became concerned about Miguel because she thought,

. . . en toda aquella barafúnda sentimental, le había dejado a un lado. Y su hijo era una tarea muy clara que Dios le había puesto a ella . . . Pero, ¿la merecía? . . . Pensó que no merecía ella el moldear el espíritu de su hijo. La misma Mariana, aunque incrédula, con su espíritu práctico, y su gran rectitud y bondad, influiría mejor que ella misma en un cuidado directo del niño. Ella era una mujer débil y extraña. Una mujer incapaz . . . (page 173).

Thus, in a state of complete self-incrimination, self-denial, and sense of inadequacy, Paulina faced the possibility of giving up her child for his sake. After Miguel had been with her for a year, attending school in

Madrid, Paulina wrote to Mariana, telling her of her decision to become a nun and that "El sacrificio más grande es el de separarme del niño, pero he pensado, . . . que el niño se lo puedo dejar totalmente a Eulogio y también a tí . . ." (page 246). This plan was abandoned when Miguel's sudden obstinate behavior attracted Paulina's attention and she found out what was bothering him. She spent the day trying to analyze the situation, "Siempre creía que podía abandonarle . . . y ahora . . ." (page 259). In Paulina's own words she thought:

. . . no había sido nunca demasiado tierna con Miguel. Había tenido miedo de mirarlo. Pero le divertía hacer cosas con Miguel como si fuesen compañeros más que madre e hijo. Siempre se habían llevado bien . . . (page 260).

Finally she asked the boy why he was going about with "los ojos húmedos, a punto de llorar" and was amazed at his answer:

. . . antes querías a papá, vivías con él, como todas las madres, . . . mi abuela les dijo . . . que tú te querías meter monja de esas que ya nunca más se ven y . . . que ni mi padre ni yo te habíamos importado nunca, y . . . (page 262).

The child began to cry and Paulina realized that she had been mistaken when she thought she could leave him. She said ". . . no hijito . . . No me marcharé nunca a un convento, mientras tengas necesidad de mí" (page 263). She decided she would dedicate herself to his care and training and that some day, when he was a man, he would understand

his parents were living apart because ". . . no hayamos querido hacer esa farsa de matrimonio sin amor" (page 263).

The author dealt realistically with the problem that arose over the care of Miguel and Paulina's decision was to be expected. Clinging to her love for Antonio and his desire for her, she could not face life with Eulogio who did not love her passionately. She was convinced, as previously indicated, that without love they should live apart with Miguel dividing his time between them.

Paulina's conflict over her passionate love for Antonio, her cousin by marriage, and her need for his love caused her the deepest anguish. They had met following the war, when Paulina was living in Madrid, teaching mathematics to support herself and her son. Antonio was then living in Barcelona. Antonio fell in love with her and went to see her as often as possible. The author said it was "El clásico amor del adolescente, por una mujer ocho años más vieja" and that ". . . siempre la tuvo por un ser puro, intachable. Esto era lo más gracioso" (page 37). Paulina looked upon him with indulgence, ". . . como a un niño no muy inteligente, pero sensitivo y enamorado. Un muchacho bueno . . ." (page 45). If Paulina had been the same girl as before the war, this would have been the end of it, but she had just been released from a political

prison and ". . . no tenia más patrimonio que su juventud y el deseo de reunirse pronto con Eulogio, en aquel momento aquel niño sensible, cargante, molesto y sin embargo enamorado de ella, la conmovió" (page 46).

However, Paulina was still in love with Eulogio and when Antonio accused her of coquetry, they quarreled. Antonio married his childhood sweetheart, Rita Vados, and Eulogio returned from America. The two did not meet again until Antonio and Rita returned to live in Villa de Robre because Rita was incurably ill and needed the care of her mother, the Countess Blanca. Eulogio and Paulina went to live there with Eulogio's mother because Paulina was ill and expecting another child. Thus, the author said, ". . . volvió a ver a Antonio. Sintiéndose en pleno hundimiento, en plena decadencia . . . Fea . . . Vieja . . ." (page 47).

At a time when Paulina needed friendship, love, and understanding Antonio "Atendió a Paulina con la misma solicitud que hubiese tenido para una pariente anciana. Con una mueca como de burla en la boca . . ." (page 48).

It was after this that the affair began between Paulina and Antonio and it was because of it that Paulina decided she must leave. She could no longer face Blanca, who had been so kind to her during her illness and had come to care for her. To have an affair with the husband of Blanca's daughter, and realize that Blanca knew about it, was

unbearable. Antonio, frantic when he found Paulina gone, followed her and declared his love. Paulina realized the importance of this love to her when the priest told her she must give up this married man. The author said:

Entonces Paulina sintió un dolor insoportable, una pena que tampoco tenía nada de sentimental, que era una pena pura . . . La pena de verse privada de aquel amor, de aquella presencia (page 121).

When Antonio telephoned to tell her he was coming to Madrid, frantic because he had not heard from her, in spite of her decision not to see him, she was filled with joy. It was then she knew "Ella necesitaba esa desesperación de Antonio, alguna vez. Necesitaba la exasperación de esa voz querida." She thought "No es pecado esta alegría, no es pecado . . . No lo puedo remediar." (page 167). She felt, upset, tired, and lonely when he could not come. It was not until she returned home one day to find him there that she knew why her life had seemed so sad, "Su tristeza consistía en que había intentado, en que intentaba todo el día no pensar nunca en Antonio . . . Y estaba vacía sin él . . ." (page 187). As Antonio declared his love for her saying, "Yo no quiero hijos de ti, te quiero a ti . . .," (page 191), Paulina knew that, ". . . él ahora la quería de veras, casi como la había querido de muchacho; que él, ahora, si pudiese, se casaría con ella" (page 190). But Paulina answered this declaration of love by telling

Antonio to go away. Antonio's reaction was a normal one as he replied, shocked and angry, "--Sabes lo que me pareces? Una histérica mojigata; eso me pareces . . ." to which Paulina replied "--Es que . . . yo no soy hipócrita. Nunca hago las cosas cuando creo que no debo". Antonio began to laugh and then, "Le lanzó una palabra dura" (page 192), and left, slamming the door.

Paulina spent a night of misery, wondering how she could have done this to Antonio. She thought:

Antes, estaba decidida a abandonar a mi propio hijo por Antonio . . . Ahora parece que solo tenga miedo al infierno . . . Yo le he buscado, yo . . . y ahora le dejo (page 194).

This conflict with herself over Antonio ended by Paulina telephoning him. When he did not answer after several calls, she was desperate. Antonio called her the next morning and to him she said, "Ven a buscarme." As she left with Antonio she thought "--No voy a pensar en nada . . . en nada . . ." (page 196). Later she said to him "Voy a condenar mi alma por ti" (page 229). For Paulina to have made this decision to go with Antonio was a realistic one in the face of her loneliness and need for love. It also served the author's purpose. As Paulina gained more strength from her religious convictions, she was more able to accept the possibility of giving up Antonio.

Antonio's reaction was also realistic. As Paulina became more uncertain of her decision to marry him, Antonio became more determined to have her. Antonio thought:

Le había dado siempre su ternura y había compartido los secretos de su espíritu mucho antes de que le hubiese dado su cuerpo. . . . Nadie había podido darle más que Paulina . . . Nadie podía ser su verdadera compañera más que ella (page 229).

In this expression of Antonio's feelings for Paulina as contrasted with those of Eulogio, the reader is well able to understand why Paulina wanted to marry this man who loved her for her own sake. However, when Antonio returned to see her, Paulina sent him away saying to him, "Y te quiero. No es necesario mentir. Pero si es necesario que no te lo vuelva a decir nada más" (page 236).

Antonio refused to believe that Paulina's decision was the result of her conversion. He said to her: "Tú has sido siempre una mujer puramente espiritual. . . . Lo que te pasa es una consecuencia natural . . . de tu mismo carácter" (page 240). Paulina was not able to answer Antonio when he said to her as he went away that no matter what happened he was going to marry her. The author said:

Las palabras del hombre no tenían alguno para ella. El presentimiento de que jamás volvería a oír esta voz la golpeaba y le quitaba toda otra percepción . . . Paulina . . . empezándose a dar cuenta . . . de la profunda pena que . . . podía acuchillarla tan ferozmente (page 241).

Later the author said that Paulina's study of the profound mysteries of religion had changed her life, that she "Tenia una motivación válida aquel dolor sentido al apartarse de Antonio, y se sentia contento de haberlo hecho" (page 255). Thus the author achieved her purpose in putting the extra-marital affair in the story.

There were two other persons in the book with whom Paulina was in conflict, Mariana, her mother-in-law, and Blanca, the mother of Rita. As previously stated, Paulina felt indebted to Blanca because she had befriended her in Villa de Robre and nursed her during her long illness. She felt guilty to be having an affair with her son-in-law, and this feeling about Blanca was instrumental in her decision to give up Antonio. Blanca, on the other hand, did not condemn Paulina, but rather she was the one who encouraged Paulina to become interested in religion and prayed herself for Paulina to be iluminada.

Mariana had expressed her feelings about Paulina when she said to Blanca:

Y te confieso que hubo un tiempo en que no fue santo de mi devoción . . . Pero he rectificado Cuando vi que ella sola salía adelante con el niño y que me devolvía hasta el último centimo . . . que le presté al salir de la cárcel . . . desde entonces empecé a cambiar respecto a ella. Es cierto que Eulogio podía haberse casado mejor, pero . . . yo estoy muy contenta (pages 145-146).

Blanca had not been concerned about Mariana's happiness but

whether Paulina was happy there with her. Mariana's failure to consider this possibility was typical because, ". . . todo se resolvía en lo mismo" (page 146), and this accounted for her poor relationship with Paulina. Paulina could see Mariana in retrospect ". . . inspeccionando su hermosa casa . . . tratando de comprender, al ver que todo esto marchaba perfectamente, el porqué de que Paulina hubiese dejado aquel paraíso de confort creado por ella, por este horrible pisito . . ." (pages 172-173).

Eulogio's attitude toward his mother added to the conflict Paulina felt with her. Eulogio admired his mother's efficiency, her carefully chosen clothes, her well-groomed hair. He had always loved Mariana and had felt an obligation as a boy to marry to please her. It was after Paulina's departure, however, that he knew ". . . cuánto y qué verdaderamente la necesitaba" (page 242). Eulogio's feeling of need for his mother was justified when Paulina went away, leaving Miguel behind. His disappointment in Paulina's apparent lack of interest in homemaking and care of their child after his return home, would lead to appreciation and approval of his mother's orderly, well-run house. Eulogio's idealistic conception of his mother had not been marred by her objection to his marriage to the girl he loved. The Civil War and his hasty departure had prevented that. When he returned, he was no longer the

idealistic lover, and as a practical and critical man, long deprived of the comforts of home, his pleasure in that of his mother is understandable.

Paulina's conflicts with herself and her environment have been discussed in connection with her conflicts with her family. The author throughout the latter part of the book devotes many pages to a discussion of Paulina's struggle to gain an understanding of her religion and to apply this to a solution of her problems. Without a knowledge of Catholicism, much of this discussion is meaningless and boring, and the reader is inclined to join Antonio in saying "¿Estás loca?" Paulina's struggle with herself can best be summarized in her own words as she prayed, "Que me permitas empezar a desear de corazón, sin reserva alguna, seguirte . . ." (page 233). But for Paulina,

Era difícil desear ser de Cristo, cuando sabía que ser de Cristo hacía despojar el corazón de una inicua atadura humana, tan dolorosa, tan querida, la atadura de un amor con un hombre casado (pages 224).

The author has injected into the story a juvenile delinquent, Julián, who is the son of Amalia, a woman who befriended Paulina during the war and gave her a home. She pictured the boy as pampered and protected by a doting mother, resentful of being snubbed for lack of wealth and social position, who finally committed a murder in an attempt to carry out a robbery, by methods he had observed

in American movies. The author gave a realistic and vivid description of the boy's emotions and brought the crime to a logical conclusion, penalty of death. The reader feels this incident does not really belong in the story, that it is introduced to give the author an opportunity to discuss the problem of crime, from a religious viewpoint.

Through two characters, Luisa and Francisco, poverty-stricken parents of five children, tenants in the apartment house where Paulina lived, the author presented the problems in a home where hunger created strained nerves, poor health, and marital discord. Along with her discussion of the evil of poverty, the author discussed the philosophy of birth control from the Catholic point of view.

The ending of this novel, the fact that Paulina rejected Antonio whom she really loved, to return to the security and approval of a life with Eulogio, seems very realistic for a woman of her sensitive nature who had endured so much anguish and hardship. However, whether or not the reader accepts the conversion of Paulina to Catholicism as the reason for this decision depends upon the reader's religious beliefs. The author, who states she wrote the book after her own conversion, has no doubt developed the plot in this manner to express her own convictions and

feelings about her religious belief. However, for a woman who declared that she knew right from wrong and had always forced herself to follow her convictions, and who, in her youth, had become determined not to be like her father, the decision to return to her husband and make a secure and happy home for her son, is a realistic one.

Some aspects of this novel, however, are not convincing. The reader wonders why Eulogio, who had been so much in love with Paulina, showed so little interest in Paulina upon his arrival home, after nine years in America. Neither does there seem to be adequate motivation for Antonio's love for Paulina and the ensuing affair after she returned to Villa de Robre, ill, ugly, and despondent. Sympathy hardly seems an adequate explanation for such an outcome. One would expect a man of Antonio's disposition to choose a more gay and beautiful woman to replace his ailing wife, especially when an affair with a member of the family posed so many difficulties. Without an explanation of these points, this part of the novel is not realistic.

CHAPTER III

REALISTIC TREATMENT OF EMOTIONAL CONFLICTS IN THE SHORT NOVELS

In La llamada⁴⁷ the characters suffer deep and turbulent emotional conflicts. There are sharp contrasts between them; between the good and the bad; between warm, human compassion and cold indifference. To intensify these contrasts of characters the author adds contrast of settings and environment. Against comfort and security she portrays the misery of poverty. She alludes to the hunger and privation suffered by all classes of civilians during the Spanish Civil War. Against the filth and squalor of the home of Mercedes, the protagonist, in the small sea-port village and later her living conditions in the poverty-stricken district of Barcelona, the author contrasts her childhood home and background and the small, comfortable, clean, and white-curtained apartment of her niece, Lolita.

Through the words of the old grandmother, doña Eloísa, the author expresses her ideas about the plight of the poor and deprived, about those for whom life seems hard and those for whom life seems easy. She also uses

⁴⁷Laforet, Novelas, op. cit., pp. 637-1010. All the short novels discussed in this chapter are within these pages.

this character to present the problem of old age, the insecurity, frustration and anguish suffered by the elderly person versus the reactions of the younger relatives who are responsible for her.. The light and the dark stand in bold relief throughout the novel. All of this is tempered by the religious aspect, the expressions of faith and the prayers for protection and guidance on the part of doña Eloísa, a deeply religious and compassionate old woman.

Mercedes, now middle-aged and slatternly, had been in conflict through the years with her environment, her family and friends, later her husband and children, the mores of her class, and, especially, with herself. Her family had been faced with financial insecurity when her father died, leaving his wife and two small daughters dependent upon a small pension and the help of relatives. Mercedes was a beautiful child. Both she and her sister, María Rosa, were pampered by an older brother of her father, Carlos Martí and his wife Ana María. The girls attended the best schools, associated with the children of the families with money and good social position, and spent much time in the home of their Uncle Carlos, who was a physician. While María Rosa conformed to expectations and married well, Mercedes was a flighty girl desirous of a career as an actress. At the age of eighteen she rebelled

with disastrous results against her family's plans for her. She ran off with a stage manager of questionable character. She was located and returned to her home, but from that day forward she was never allowed to enter the uncle's house nor did she or her mother receive any further financial assistance from him. Her guilt was magnified by the fact that her aunt became ill from shock and grief and died shortly after.

On the verge of starvation and desperate, Mercedes married a man beneath her social position, a fellow recently discharged from the service, whom she described as a good sort. Her mother went to live with the sister Maria Rosa. Only doña Eloísa, the mother of Mercedes' brother-in-law, questioned the wisdom of the marriage. Mercedes thought this was because she did not want her son to have the responsibility of Mercedes' mother and this idea made Mercedes more determined to go through with the marriage, although she did not love the man. Her mother told her love would come with children, but this did not happen. Mercedes felt deceived and cheated. She continued to long for a career in the theatre, which her husband could not understand. When she took money to attend a production, her husband beat her. About her husband she said:

Me engañó a mí. . . . Mi novio hablaba de que tenía tierras por aquí . . . Y las tenía, ya lo creo . . . Pero todo desapareció. . . . Tuvimos hijos, pero el cariffo no ha venido. . . . Cuando tengo dinero y hay teatro me escapo al teatro . . . entonces él me muele las costillas . . . Porque yo no he perdido mis aficiones . . . (page 651).

Both her husband and children considered Mercedes chiflada, and the neighbors described her as un poquillo lela, a simpleton. Her husband's attitude toward her is best described by this reply to her question about visiting her family in Barcelona, "Vete adonde quieras; mientras más lejos mejor . . . Y no fastidies. . . . A ver si desapareces un buen día y nos dejas vivir" (page 655).

Mercedes had the same feeling for her husband, "the farther away, the better". To doña Eloísa's suggestion that the hand-to-mouth existence she was suffering in Barcelona was a terrible life she replied, "¿Vida terrible? . . . Usted no sabe lo que es una vida terrible . . . Vida terrible la que yo llevé al lado de aquel hombre" (page 666).

Mercedes was in no better standing with her children, according to her own admission. When doña Eloísa asked if she had any children she replied, "Siete. . . . Cinco murieron . . . Los dos que quedan son grandes y no me quieren. Salieron al padre . . . (page 666). Her son expressed his attitude of unconcern toward his mother when he said, "Mi madre, la pobre, está así, como quien dice,

algo guillada. Aquella casa está muy abandonada . . . No es que a mí me importe; yo allí no vivo, soy un hombre casado . . ." (page 645). The fifteen-year-old daughter's concern for her father was expressed in an accusation toward her mother, "No habrá preparado la comida de padre, ¿verdad?" (page 652) as she disappeared into the kitchen in search of food for him.

This attitude on the part of the children was possibly the result of Mercedes' lack of concern and affection for them, which seemed evident from the manner in which she referred to them. When doña Eloísa asked if she ever thought about them Mercedes replied, "No pienso, no . . . No pienso. Ya es hora de que una vez en la vida piense en mí, en mí . . ." (page 666). One gathers that Mercedes had always been more concerned about herself and the career she believed she had sacrificed than about her family. Don Juan, a close friend of her uncle Carlos and a childhood acquaintance of Mercedes, was shocked at the cold, calm manner with which she referred to the children she had lost. In the words of the author:

Don Juan había visto muchas cosas en su vida y no era capaz de asustarse demasiado, pero aquella tranquilidad de Mercedes hablando de sus hijos muertos le estremeció. Pensó en su propia hija, que tenía la misma edad de Mercedes. . . . ¿Podría hablar así su hija, aun después de una vida como la que Mercedes había llevado? Don Juan confiaba en que no (page 652).

When an acquaintance, prompted by self-pity, said that Mercedes did not know what it was to lose a child, Mercedes realized that was true. She realized "Que todas aquellas criaturas que se le habian muerto, eran de otra mujer lejana, insensible" (page 668).

It seems evident that Mercedes had been unable to face the unfamiliar world in which she found herself after her girlhood folly had caused her to lose both social status and financial security. Marriage had not been the solution and Mercedes had escaped from this painful world into one of her own in which she lived for the day she could embark upon her theatrical career. She harbored memories of her childhood when she was loved and admired, she cherished an old photograph of herself as a beautiful child in fine clothing. She ignored completely her husband, her children, her surroundings. When she thought of them at all it was only to blame them for her sorry state and for standing in the way of her future success. She withdrew from the conflict with her environment and her family by ignoring both, but she remained in conflict with herself. She felt deep anguish and frustration, loneliness, a desire to be understood and appreciated in terms of success as an actress, not as a homemaker. Her longing for this career had been so strong that she once was accustomed to go down to the sea-shore and stand on a rock to recite

poetry, her arms thrown apart as the actresses she had seen in photographs. It had been years since she had done this, however, because of the stoning she had received the last time, "Unos chiquillos, escondidos, la acechaban . . . Desde entonces no volví" (page 654).

It is at this point that the action of the story begins. Mercedes' dream to return to Barcelona to pursue her career was made possible by an old family friend and professional companion of her uncle Carlos, don Juan, who chanced to stop at the sea-port where Mercedes and her family were living and to recognize a family resemblance in her son, a waiter in the small café. Following a sudden whim, after learning the boy's identity, the old gentleman went to visit Mercedes, whom he had not heard mentioned for years. He was both shocked and depressed by the story of her life and her present situation. Not knowing what else he could do, he left money for her and, reluctantly, the address of doña Eloísa, the woman who had offered friendship to Mercedes when she predicted the failure of her marriage.

Mercedes arrived at the home of doña Eloísa in Barcelona wearing a dirty home-made green dress, her crimped, peroxide-blond hair disheveled from the train trip. She was carrying all her possessions in a basket on her arm. Doña Eloísa was living with the family of her

grand-daughter, Lolita, the child of Mercedes' sister and the son of doña Eloísa. Mercedes' conflict with both family and environment began anew. Doña Eloísa, a compassionate and understanding old woman, received her kindly and strove to help her against all odds, but Lolita was horrified at the appearance of this aunt, whom she had never heard mentioned, and both she and her husband Luis, agreed they did not wish to have her come to their home. They were not financially able to keep her, they did not wish to do so, nor did they wish to have doña Eloísa, whom they supported, have anything to do with her. To Mercedes Luis said, "Aquí no podemos tenerla" (page 659), and Lolita said to doña Eloísa, ". . . te voy a pedir que esa mujer no entre otro día en el dormitorio de mi niño . . ." (page 667), a room which doña Eloísa shared.

Mercedes' struggle with poverty continued. When her money was gone she appealed to doña Eloísa, who had no money but gave her an old gold watch to use as security for a loan. With the money she bought an evening dress for her "début" and went to live in a district frequented by unfortunate individuals like herself, ". . . un barrio en el que su facha no extrañaba, un café donde podía permanecer horas al abrigo de la calle" (page 667). There she witnessed true hardships and for the first time became

concerned about those around her. She even shared her money with them, leaving herself destitute again.

Ya no le quedaba casi dinero, prácticamente nada . . . Y todo el mundo tenía hambre alrededor suyo. ella había aforado muchas cosas junto a su marido, había creído pasar años de miseria . . . Pero la miseria era esto que pululaba a su alrededor, y en lo que ella se veía envuelta . . . Por primera vez se preocupaba de los demás (page 668).

She refused with indignation to follow the suggestion of a woman she met there that she seek the company of men. Men actually showed no interest in her.

Mercedes' sole concern was the opportunity to embark on her career. It was this same woman who befriended her and who finally arranged for her appearance at a tavern which sponsored a talent show for would-be artists. Her reception by the audience at this performance was the turning point in the life of Mercedes. Doña Eloísa was there to witness the performance and the catastrophic results. She closed her eyes at sight of the creature on the rostrum in the low-cut dress, large picture hat, and moth-eaten furs.

Estaba horrible. Era horrible su traje. Horrible su cabello quemado a trozos, con las raíces oscuras. Horribles aquellos abalorios que se había puesto . . . Sin embargo, la aplaudieron antes de empezar. Ella saludó. Abrió los brazos y echó la cabeza hacia atrás. Luego empezó. Doña Eloísa cerró los ojos para no verla, para oír su voz solamente. Y su voz era agradable, llena. . . . ¡Ah, Dios mío; tiene talento!" (page 679).

This exclamation of pleasure by doña Eloísa was cut short by the laughter that began to come from the audience, the whistling and booing. When Mercedes stopped, they urged her on, but the ridicule continued until she burst forth with an insult directed to them, stumbled down the steps from the rostrum, and upon reaching the table where doña Eloísa and her friend waited ". . . se echó a llorar desesperada". In response to doña Eloísa's words of consolation she said "Escribale a mi marido, doña Eloísa . . . Me vuelvo . . ." (page 680).

Mercedes seemed to believe and to gain consolation from doña Eloísa's assurance that she had enjoyed her performance, that Mercedes had much talent, and that she should ignore the ridicule of an ignorant and uncultured audience. However, she was even more impressed by recalling a discussion before the performance between doña Eloísa and Mercedes' friend, una mujer gruesa y pintada. As doña Eloísa had listened to the friend make excuses for her miserable state and conclude that for some life was easy and for others difficult, doña Eloísa had thought that life, in truth, was not easy for anyone. For her granddaughter, Lolita, for example, it would be easier and cheaper with her husband's meager income, to have a dirty and neglected home, ill-kept children and, if her husband complained, to go to bed and think about death "como había hecho esta

estúpida de Mercedes durante años" (page 678). These thoughts, together with the declaration of Mercedes' friend that, were there a God he would not consent to such injustice, caused doña Eloísa to say in a trembling voice:

Yo sé una cosa . . . que Dios existe, y que la miseria puede llevarse de muchas formas. En casa hemos pasado hambre durante la guerra, pero no hubo suciedad ni abandono, porque mi nieta es una mujer heroica; ella tiene su pago, en su conciencia limpia, en el respeto de su marido. . . . No todo depende del dinero ni siquiera de la juventud ni de la salud (page 678).

The failure of her "début" plus the memory of the words of doña Eloísa forced Mercedes to face the truth about herself and to begin to resolve her conflicts.

On the day following her "début", after spending the night in ". . . aquel cuarto de pesadilla con la amiga gorda . . ." (page 683) and quarreling with her friend, Mercedes wandered the streets thinking about her life and doña Eloísa's comments about Lolita. She began to realize she was partially to blame for the fact her marriage had been so miserable and that she had not enjoyed her children because she had thought only of herself.

This abrupt change in Mercedes and the resolution of her conflicts with her environment, her family, and herself, seems more idealistic than realistic and contrived on the part of the author. One Sunday afternoon, about a

month later, Mercedes appeared at the home of doña Eloísa in the same green dress she was wearing on the day of her first arrival, but now clean and well-ironed, her face unpainted, her hair well-groomed. She informed doña Eloísa that she was working as a servant in the home of a good family and made this explanation of the change:

Pero ahora he vivido. Me ha dado cuenta de lo que es la miseria de verdad. De que no sólo sufro yo, sino también otros . . . No sé cómo decirle, doña Eloísa, parece que me he vuelto distinta . . . (page 684).

Mercedes had gone to work to earn money to repay doña Eloísa for the watch she had sold. Doña Eloísa assured her it was a gift and suggested she use the money to buy a gift for her daughter and a ticket to return to her family. Doña Eloísa had written to the husband, as Mercedes had requested, and had received a pathetic letter in which he said they were lonely without Mercedes, that both he and their daughter needed her, that he could not sleep without her beside him. He anxiously awaited her return.

Thus Mercedes' conflicts with her family and with herself were solved. The author said, "Mercedes sentía una gran paz y, sí alegría . . . Era como si hubiera estado muy enferma y un medicamento fuerte la hubiera curado" (page 685). Mercedes was anxious to return to her home and to an environment which she was determined would not be the same. Half asleep that night it occurred to her,

No hay nada como viajar, para darse cuenta de las cosas, para conocer la vida. . . . Y más tarde se le ocurrió la idea de que en una ventana de su casa iban a poner cortinas blancas como las de la galería de Lolita (page 685).

The author explains this idealistic solution to the conflicts of Mercedes by the religious influence of doña Eloísa, who through all the years had prayed nightly for the welfare of Mercedes and who had prayed fervently for guidance in helping her after she had arrived in Barcelona. Doña Eloísa considered the appearance of Mercedes after all those years as God's answer to her prayers, and that it was His wish that she help Mercedes solve her problems. Doña Eloísa believed that with God's help a miracle had been performed, but Mercedes did not believe in miracles. She felt she had been cured through suffering.

Ella había estado un poco desquiciada. Luego había sufrido espantosamente, y se había curado. Aquel viaje había sido algo así como uno de esos tratamientos que se les hacen a los locos, que o les mata o les cura (page 686).

Doña Eloísa would have agreed with this but she would have continued giving thanks to God with the same enthusiasm, "Porque doña Eloísa y Mercedes tenían una idea distinta de lo que es un milagro. Nada más" (page 686).

Doña Eloísa, the important minor character in the story, also suffered conflicts with her family, who disapproved of her association with Mercedes and of her desire to help her; with Mercedes of whom she disapproved; and

with herself in her uncertainty as to where her responsibility lay. Should she follow the wishes of her granddaughter and leave Mercedes to her own devices, or fulfill her promise to Mercedes that she would help her if she ever needed a friend? Doña Eloísa solved her conflicts through prayer and faith in God as her counselor, and with the help of her spiritual advisor, el padre Jiménez, who supported her in her belief that she was right to have deceived her family in order to aid Mercedes. Lolita and Luis were so disturbed by doña Eloísa's mysterious absence from their home until two in the morning when she attended Mercedes "début", by her illness that followed, and by her refusal to explain her strange behavior, that they considered placing her in an institution. El padre Jiménez kept her secret but quieted their fears with these words:

Nada, nada, tranquilidad . . . Doña Eloísa está tan bien de la cabeza como ustedes o como yo . . . No estoy autorizado a contarles dónde estuvo aquella noche, pero sí puedo decirles que tuvo unas razones altruistas para estar fuera de casa . . . Hizo una obra de caridad . . . Quizá mal entendida . . . Quizá inútil . . . Pero una obra de caridad al fin (page 681).

Thus for both Mercedes and doña Eloísa there was a happy ending.

El último verano is a sentimental story about the struggle of a closely knit family to provide the money necessary to send the incurably ill mother, doña Pepita, to San Sebastián for a vacation, the one thing she had

longed for all her married life. This previously unexpressed desire on the part of doña Pepita was revealed to her youngest son, Luis, age fifteen, when he had asked what she would like to do more than anything else, something that she had never been able to do. The question was prompted by the fact a specialist that day had declared doña Pepita might not live long, that this might be her "último verano".

This crisis in the family, the threat of loss of the mother, and the difficult problem of securing funds to grant her desire for a vacation, revealed clearly the inter-family relationships and the conflicts that existed between members of the group. As is true in all families, there was a conflict between ideas, interests, and sense of responsibility among the three sons; Roberto, the oldest and married to Lolita; Lucas, the middle son who had a sweetheart, María Pilar; and Luis, who was attending the Instituto.

Both Luis and Roberto agreed that the mother's desire for a vacation in San Sebastián was una tontería because it would cost more than the family could afford. Roberto pointed out that not one son was able to contribute and the father would need his money to meet medical expense. Doña Pepita concurred and was willing to dismiss the matter. However, when Luis informed the family gathering of his

mother's desire, Lucas unexpectedly stated, ". . . eso deberfan hacer los padres este año" (page 702). Don Roberto, the father, joined forces with Lucas by suggesting he might secure a loan. "Quizá pudiera pedir un préstamo . . ." (page 703).

Roberto, who had been unaware of the seriousness of his mother's illness, was torn between obligation to his wife, Lolita, who was expecting a child, and obligation to his mother for whom Lucas asked him to sacrifice Lolita's vacation money. Roberto was willing, but Lolita would not consent to this and Lucas departed in anger. Lolita burst into tears and then Roberto was angry with Lucas for upsetting his wife. However, Roberto himself was gradually becoming annoyed with Lolita's selfishness and finally mustered the courage to ask her to give their vacation fund to his mother. Lolita became furious and accused Roberto of lack of consideration for her and their unborn child. Roberto knew his mother would say that Lolita was right, but he also knew that were the circumstances reversed, his mother would have given her money to Lolita. Because Roberto was such a good man, ". . . una perla, un muchacho de esos 'que ya no se encuentran' . . ." (page 708), he could not hate his wife but relieved his feelings by hating her picture. The author said:

Aquel corazón suyo, tan dulcemente moldeado por su madre. Sentía doloridos los ojos, y la boca amarga. Y de ninguna manera aborrecía a Lolita, dormida e indefensa a su lado; pero sí comenzó a aborrecer, incomprensible y furiosamente, al gran retrato de Lolita cuyo marco brillaba sobre la mesilla en aquella semioscuridad (page 709).

Roberto could not reconcile this conflict and was deeply disturbed, a realistic reaction. Roberto was not alone in his conflict with his wife, Lolita. Lucas blamed her for Roberto's attitude, and this added to his previous feelings of dislike for her. However, Lolita believed Lucas liked her very much and several times mentioned this to Roberto, who took pride in his brother's presumed jealousy of his good luck in finding such a wife. For the benefit of Lucas he showed particular attention to Lolita, a display of affection which Lucas considered sickening. After Roberto said to him, "Ya verás lo que es esto, si llegas a tener la suerte de pescar una mujercita parecida a Lola", Lucas always repressed the reply, "¡Parecida a Lola! ¡Dios me guarde!" (page 704). While trying to explain to the couple the seriousness of the mother's illness, "Lucas, exasperado, pensó, como tantas otras veces, en la paciencia de su hermano, al aguantar a semejante idiota" (page 705). Thus Lucas rejected both his brother Roberto and his sister-in-law, Lolita.

Luis also considered Lolita stupid and his brother Roberto a fool. He believed overwork accounted for his

mother's illness and so he resented the presence of Roberto and Lolita at dinner once a week. To his mother he said ". . . haz el favor de no atarearte tanto por esa idiota de Lolita" (page 694). When Roberto proposed a toast to him after dinner because Lucas would soon be an uncle (Roberto's way of announcing they were expecting a child), "Luis le correspondió con una mirada sombría. Su hermano mayor . . . le pareció un perfecto tonto" (page 701). He shared with Lucas a dislike for the oldest brother and his wife.

The relationship between Luis and Lucas, the two boys still living at home, also was strained, "Luis estaba siempre a la defensiva contra aquel bruto de Lucas" (page 692), who was curious about his affairs. Here the author described a typical situation of sibling rivalry. Like children of his age, Luis had sus tesoros ocultos which he examined only in privacy. It infuriated Lucas to find Luis locked in his room and his usual reaction was to pound on the door and shout, "Abre en seguida. ¿Qué demonios estás haciendo?", to which Luis would reply, "Hago lo que me da la gana" (page 700). The two brothers also quarreled about Luis' work at school. Lucas had no confidence in the boy and did not believe he studied enough. To Luis he said, "Te advierto que si pierdes el curso te deslomo, conque andate con cuidado." This increased the

boy's anxiety about his success but his response was unconcerned, "Si yo pierdo o gano el curso no es cosa tuya." Lucas reminded him that he helped maintain the house and pay his fees, which Luis knew was true, but he made the typical retaliatory reply, "Pues no contribuyas, y en paz" (page 715).

Luis was very unhappy and in conflict with himself. Added to the desperate concern he felt about his school work, now that examination time was near, was a guilty feeling about his reply to his mother when she said she longed for a vacation, "Eso es una tontería, mamá" (page 695). Such a dream was foolish for a woman in her circumstances, but he had hurt her feelings and this tormented him. He had not been wise enough to think as she, "Cada uno es como es" (page 696), an expression she had used to defend one child against the criticisms of another. His guilt feelings were increased because he had not offered to contribute his money toward her vacation, money he had secretly earned and hidden in his box of treasures. No one knew that Luis had this money. Here again was a conflict within himself, a conflict of desire to help his mother against a desire to own a bicycle.

Luis' school affairs also caused a personal conflict. He was the only child who had been sent to school because his parents could not afford to send the older boys. They

were all proud of the fact he could attend. With anguish Luis thought, "¿Qué pasaría en su casa si resultase que tuviera que repetir el curso entero? Tampoco esto quería pensarlo" (pages 698-699). Why could not he have gone to work like the rest? As a matter of fact, he had worked part time, without their permission, to earn the money for a bicycle and had not been studying the long hours they presumed, but only Lucas distrusted him. The day Luis received the notice he had failed, he could not force himself to go home. He spent the day wandering along the river, swimming in the murky water, lying on the bank, and sleeping in the sun. Luis, like characters in other stories by this author, went out into the open air and sunshine to calm his troubled spirits. Contact with nature served as a catharsis. When evening came he wandered home and crept into the house, unnoticed. As he sat on his bed,

. . . apoyó los codos en las rodillas y se cogió la cabeza con las manos. Se daba cuenta de que no tenía valor para comunicar su suspenso. Por mucho que quisiera olvidarlo, sabía que en aquella casa se hacían verdaderos sacrificios por sus estudios. En cuanto a escaparse . . . (page 723).

Luis could not bring himself to falsify his grades by changing them on the report, nor could he face his parents. Then he discovered his pen he prized had disappeared from his pocket, probably stolen when he fell asleep on the river bank, and he burst into tears. There his mother

found him and sat down beside him. Carmen Laforet

described a poignant and realistic scene when she wrote:

Casi sin notarlo, el muchacho se encontró en sus brazos, llorando, con la cabeza apoyada en su hombro. Si alguno de sus compañeros de clase hubiera podido verlo, Luis habría muerto de vergüenza. Pero nadie lo veía, y él se sentía derretido en una extraña dulzura. Hay veces que las cosas sencillas, humildes, tiernas, como aquellos besos que su madre le daba . . . no resultan ridículos ni humillantes (page 724).

Suddenly Luis said to his mother, "He perdido todo el curso", a fact the members of the family already knew.

Dofia Pepita had asked them to await his admission because she had confidence in the boy. To Luis' question, "¿Por qué tienes confianza en mí? Nunca hice nada para eso," the mother replied, ". . . porque eres mi hijo . . ."

(page 725). For doña Pepita, this was a convincing reply.

Lucas also had his personal conflicts. Following his quarrel with Roberto and Lolita about money, he felt very ashamed and he thought, "Me he portado como un bruto, pero . . ." (page 711). There had been several peros in the life of Lucas that day. He had suffered the greatest grief of his life upon hearing the words of the doctor about his mother. The following hours at the office seemed endless and in his anguish he had forgotten to meet his sweetheart, María Pilar. Angry, she had gone off with someone else. When he went to her home to apologize he had been rebuffed and insulted by her mother. Roberto

did not know all of this when he had become impatient with Lucas. Here the author inserted a paragraph of thought-provoking philosophy, one that could serve as a guide in understanding the behavior of others:

Siempre hay un pero en la vida y en las acciones de los hombres, un chorrillo de amargura que va llenando el corazón hasta los bordes, y de pronto, una gota de nada, una vacilación, una torpeza sin importancia, lo hace rebosar. Lo malo es que estas cosas son inexplicables (page 711).

Lucas, lamenting his bad behavior, which had resulted in the quarrels with his family and sweetheart, wandered the streets until dawn. He gazed at the home of María Pilar, whom he longed to have near to comfort him in these hours of anguish and torment. At church the next day he ". . . formuló sus confusas sensaciones en un rápido ruego:

'Dios mío, que se cure mi madre y que pueda ver yo hoy a María Pilar'" (page 714). To his amazement, when he raised his head from his prayer he saw María Pilar sitting two benches ahead of him. She never attended church but once she had said,

Claro que un día iré por verte, a esa iglesia donde tú vas . . . Por verte y por acostumbrarme, porque cuando nos casemos me tendrás que volver beata yo también (page 715).

Lucas knew he was forgiven, for she had come to see him.

In the end the whole family crisis was resolved because of the strong love that the boys and the father had for the mother. Lucas forgave Roberto for his attitude

because ". . . sabia que Roberto queria tanto a la madre como él mismo." He forgave Luis because his situation was different. "Había nacido a raíz de los sustos y las hambres de la guerra, . . . y era una ser aparte en la casa." Besides, from Luis had come the idea that his mother's last summer "debía ser un verano muy hermoso, lleno de ilusión. Un verano distinto a todos . . ." (page 710). The author thus solved the antagonism between the brothers in a satisfactory manner. Luis solved his own personal conflicts and amazed the family at dinner one night by placing eight hundred pesetas on the table and saying, "Fara el veraneo de los padres." Luis admitted he had earned it "En la loteria de los ciegos . . ." but the family was so surprised and pleased that he escaped punishment. To Luis "Le parecia que era la primera vez que sentia una alegría así de ver felices a los demás, simplemente" (page 728). Lucas had been able to borrow a thousand pesetas from his office and his sweetheart had added another thousand, the money she had saved for her wedding clothes. Doña Pepita was overwhelmed. She had thought María Pilar a crude and ill-mannered girl, not a lady like Lolita. Don Roberto who knew this said, "Eueno, mujer, ¿que dices a esto? . . ." Doña Pepita was speechless in the face of such unselfishness. She asked Lucas to deliver this message to María Pilar:

Dile que yo, a su edad, no hubiera dado mis ahorros para que una suegra desconocida se fuese de veraneo. Esta es la verdad, y tengo que decirla" (page 729).

Only Lolita remained selfish to the end. When doña Pepita arrived at the station dressed in a new black coat and hat, Lolita inspected her from head to foot and asked about the coat. Doña Pepita sensed she was thinking it a shame to waste money on a summer coat for only one summer. Doña Pepita derived satisfaction from telling Lolita María Pilar had made the coat and that she was leaving it to Lolita. As was her custom when faced with the results of her actions, Lolita began to cry.

Roberto suffered a week of anguish after he promised to give Lucas two thousand pesetas for el último verano de su madre. He could not bear to deceive his wife and take their savings. He spent nights without sleep, particularly when he learned María Pilar had given her money. Finally, he went to a moneylender to whom he agreed to pay four thousand pesetas for the loan of two thousand. This meant at least two years of sacrificing his transportation and lunch money to repay the loan so that Lolita would not know about it. He arrived at the station just as the train was leaving and tossed into his mother's lap a bag of caramels with the bills inside, shouting, "¡Mamá! . . . Ahí dentro va lo que tú querías" (page 734).

Dofia Pepita had also had conflicts about her illness. In the beginning she feared death, but after seeing the anxiety and worry she was causing her family ". . . sólo tenía miedo de la angustia de ellos" (page 690). A change came over doña Pepita. There had been a time when she would have expressed disapproval of María Pilar and objected to Lucas marrying her; she would have complained about the conduct of Luis and his failure in school; she would have cried in self-pity and created a scene. Now things were different. She had mellowed. She realized her whole family was disturbed because this might be her last summer. As for herself,

. . . Ella misma se portaba como si estuviera despidiéndose de la vida. Comprendía con un sentido más dulce y tolerante todas las cosas. Delante de la muerte las cosas todas tienen menos importancia. Se entiende que la vida deba de ser una cosa más suave, más humana . . . (page 726).

Dofia Pepita actually refused to believe that this would be her last summer, but she was asking nothing for herself. To her husband she said:

Sólo le he pedido a la Virgen una cosa: que me conserve la vida mientras todos seáis tan tontos que no podáis aún manejaros solos . . . Sé que me lo concederá . . . Y va para largo (page 727).

As doña Pepita, sitting beside her husband, looked out the train window at her family group she whispered, "Son tan tontos que es imposible que yo me muera. Imposible . . ." (page 734). Then she was quiet because she suddenly felt

very ill, so ill that she was thinking perhaps this would be her ultimo verano.

Thus the story ends with doña Pepita's desire for a summer vacation granted and, it seems, her acceptance of her destiny. As for her family, their efforts and sacrifice for their mother seem to have led to greater understanding between them and a better knowledge of themselves. The conflicts they faced were typical of family life although the story is sentimental.

El noviazgo is considered one of the best of Carmen Laforet's short novels and the author included it in her volume Mis páginas mejores. It is in the vein of her earlier works and contains none of the new idealism and the sentimentalism found in most of her recent writings. There are two principal characters: Alicia, now fifty, a blue-stocking spinster who has worked for thirty years as secretary to a wealthy man with whom she has always been in love; and De Arco, now seventy-five, the wealthy employer who is a widower and, tired of philandering, is looking for a restful old age and someone who will be a nurse and companion to him in his declining years.

Alicia, a sensitive and shy girl, at the age of twenty was faced with an economic problem and loss of social status when her father died, leaving a younger brother and her mother dependent upon her for support. The father had

held a minor diplomatic post, and the family had spent several years in England where Alicia had attended school and learned the language. She also knew French and since her father's death three years before, had studied typing and shorthand. Because of these qualifications, a family friend recommended her as secretary to a very wealthy man, De Arco, who dealt in foreign trade and belonged to the "international set". At that time it was rare to find a girl from a good family working in an office, a fact which concerned Alicia. De Arco's first words to her were, "Usted no tiene aspecto sufragista, Alicia; ¿por qué trabaja?" (page 746).

Alicia's deep emotional feeling about her social status was clearly revealed in a family crisis. This followed her mother's words of warning about falling in love with her employer because, ". . . aunque estuviese libre no sería nunca para ti . . .". Alicia responded by shouting insults at her mother and declaring that she had never thought of De Arco as anyone other than her employer and she added:

. . . pero que en caso de casarse, sólo un hombre de la categoría de De Arco la podría satisfacer, puesto que ella no se consideraba inferior en nada a la señora de De Arco, ni a otras muchas brillantes damas de la sociedad, que habían surgido de la nada sin haber usado nunca apellidos tan ilustres y sonoros como los suyos, y que si su madre se creía rebajada por ser pobre, ella, Alicia, no creía, por este hecho, haber perdido la más mínima categoría (page 752).

Alicia's need to feel and appear superior to the position which she held was indicated also by the fact that she wore ruffled, pleated, and elaborately trimmed dresses to work because, "Los trajes 'estilo secretaria' le daban horror" (page 739). However, her extremely difficult economic situation did not allow her to buy clothing often and therefore, "Su figura delgadita, rígida, acentuaba aún más esta impresión antigua y melancólica de maniquí" (page 739).

Faced with the worry of economic difficulties and the social stigma of having to work, and finding herself alone for days in the office of the enormous house of De Arco, ". . . un verdadero palacio que De Arco había recibido en herencia, junto con un título de marqués, poco antes de la guerra civil," (page 745), it was an easy escape for Alicia to withdraw into an imaginary world of her own where she dreamed she was a part of that elegant life.

Alicia had been in the office a month before she saw De Arco and during that time she had imagined him as ". . . una especie de dios del dinero y los negocios . . . un señor muy serio" (page 747). Then she overheard a conversation between her mother and a friend in which the friend questioned the wisdom of letting a young girl work for such a Don Juan whose ". . . mujer es una mártir; todo el mundo lo sabe . . .!" (page 747). After this De Arco was, in the imagination of Alicia, "joven, peligroso y

atractivo," and "Si el amor es interés profundo, desvelo por alguien, Alicia se sintió enamorada de De Arco antes de verle . . ." (page 749). This was the first time she had been in love. She had never had a real sweetheart and the image of this exciting man was fulfilling this unmet need. By the time she first saw De Arco she had gathered all the facts about his past. She spent all her time going through old newspapers, searching society columns, observing his possessions in the house. As a result,

La idea de De Arco como un elegante caballero derrochador, guapo, infiel a su mujer, con la que--según supuso Alicia--se había casado por interés, le llamaba la imaginación, indignándola o intrigándola (page 748).

It had been years since life had been so interesting for Alicia.

When the story opens Alicia had lived for thirty years without facing reality, lost in a world she had created for herself, scarcely aware of what was going on around her. From the moment of the quarrel with her mother over the warning against love for De Arco, her family had known a different Alicia. She was always on guard, as if someone were going to wound or kill her, she scarcely mentioned the name of De Arco, her disposition ". . . se agrió, sin que ella se diera cuenta de este fenómeno" (page 753). She became completely withdrawn and sought solitude in her own home. It had been years since

she had shared her mother's life or paid any attention to her. "Últimamente, Alicia se había convertido en un ser agrio, irónico" (page 765). In regard to her appearance, "El tiempo había comenzado en aquel rostro una indefinible labor de destrucción, pero lo hacía de una manera muy especial, fría y correcta como la misma Alicia" (page 738).

Alicia was abruptly taken out of her dream world and forced to face reality when De Arco unexpectedly proposed marriage. She had waited thirty years for this but when it came she was unable to accept the proposal in a realistic manner. She was forced to face the truth of her situation and what she saw was painful; so painful that she immediately withdrew back into her world of fine ladies, and dashing, attentive young men. Although she had known and loved De Arco for thirty years, she could not accept as a friendly gesture his proposal that they call each other by their first names and use the familiar tú. She avoided accepting the proposal by saying she would have to ask her mother. She became hysterical when he did not phone the night of the proposal or send flowers the next day, which her mother often said her father had done. In the throes of her anguish about this, "Por la cabeza de Alicia pasó como un relámpago la idea de que ella no amaba, sino que aborrecía a De Arco" (page 771). She had spent years ". . . encerrada en una vida donde la fantasía tenía mucho

que hacer . . . Muy poco las palabras coleccionando sonrisas de De Arco, intentando adivinar sus gestos, sus pensamientos . . ." (page 753).

The truth about what had happened to Alicia was apparent to her mother, doña Ana, when Alicia began to make wedding plans. She demanded a large wedding, such as she had seen pictured in the newspaper accounts of De Arco's first marriage; she wanted a distant relative with an obscure title to give her away; she wanted to be presented to society, and to move to a luxurious apartment for a few weeks before the wedding. As the mother lay awake that night, following a dramatic scene with Alicia in which Alicia told her mother to leave her alone, "Déjame . . . Estoy harta de que me espíes . . . ¡Déjame!" (page 771), she slowly began to wonder about the sanity of Alicia:

La idea que tuvo poco antes, cuando oyó hablar de su inexistente primo el conde, empezó a meterse, insidiosa, en el cerebro de la pobre señora . . . ¿Estaría ella viviendo con una loca? Se habría vuelto loca su pobre hija? ¿Y si no existiera tampoco aquel noviazgo con De Arco? ¿Y si todo fuese una fantasía de aquella desgraciada hija suya? (pages 771-772).

The story reached a climax in the private dining room of a country inn where De Arco took Alicia to lunch and to hear her reply to his proposal of marriage. They were accompanied by Alicia's mother, doña Ana, at the insistence of Alicia, for the sake of propriety, but to the consternation and amusement of De Arco. As they travelled along the way and

doña Ana listened to Alicia's fantastic stories of the luxurious life she had had in her childhood, doña Ana began to realize: "Hacía años y años que Alicia vivía así, lejana, metida como en su sueño interior . . . Y ahora que había llegado la realidad . . . pues seguía soñando" (page 779). Doña Ana was sure of this when a disagreement developed between Alicia and De Arco over the wedding ceremony. While De Arco remained patient to the end as he pointed out the desirability of a quiet and simple wedding for an old man such as he, who would look grotesque and ridiculous walking down the aisle to the sounds of Mendelssohn, Alicia became more and more persistent in her demands for a fashionable wedding with presentation to the King (who, as De Arco pointed out, did not exist). At last she burst into expressions of real hatred for this man when she said:

Ha presumido usted demasiado de libertino . . . señor De Arco, para que una mujer decente pueda casarse con usted antes de haber sido presentada a toda la buena sociedad para que sepan qué clase de persona es su futura mujer, qué apellidos y qué cultura tiene . . . Me ha humillado usted demasiado, De Arco, para soportar una humillación más, la peor de todas (page 784).

Alicia had never really felt that De Arco appreciated her. She realized that she was ". . . para De Arco, fue durante mucho, muchísimo tiempo, un mueble más de oficina . . . (page 754).

When De Arco, unable to believe this drastic change he was seeing in Alicia, asked her to reconsider marrying him in a quiet wedding ceremony and living a simple life with him Alicia sprang to her feet. In response to his statement "¡Naturalmente que es mi última palabra . . .!" she let go in the following brief declaration of triumph, all the resentment, frustration, anguish and hate toward De Arco that she had repressed for years:

Pues tengo el gusto, señor De Arco, de darle calabazas . . . Tengo la satisfacción inmensa de darle calabazas . . . Tengo el orgullo de negarme a ser su mujer . . . ¿Entiende usted? Me niego a ser su mujer (page 785).

Thus Alicia dissolved a conflict of thirty years in a magnificent performance and she suddenly felt happy, a happiness that was brief but splendid. She felt triumphant, as if she towered over De Arco, who looked like she had slapped his face. To her mother she said as she left the room:

¿Te has fijado? ¿Te has fijado? . . . Jamás había recibido un desplante así . . . ¡Qué cara puso! . . . En su vida había tropezado con una señora hasta hoy (page 786).

Alicia's face was radiant, but her mother could not answer for she had burst into tears. For Alicia, who was obviously emotionally ill, there could be no hope for a normal life. Hers would be one of fantasy or despair.

De Arco fared much better than Alicia. He had a normal and natural interest in her when, at the age of

seventy-five, bored with business affairs and social obligations, with no desire to travel, he was looking for companionship with someone with whom he could feel comfortable. He was in conflict with his own feelings of loneliness, boredom, frustration and anxiety concerning care during his old age. To Alicia he explained, "Me siento un anciano achacoso sin tener edad para sentirme así. Sólo contigo me rejuvenezco un poco; me parece que hasta me consideras peligroso . . . (page 743). He was frank in telling her why he had decided to marry her in preference to the many widows among his acquaintances:

Lo único que me ha hecho pensar en casarme contigo y en que tú aceptarías es que sé muy bien cuánto me has querido y me quieres. Creo que no hay nada más importante para vivir juntos dos personas. Al menos a nuestra edad . . . (page 745).

De Arco was a man with not only wealth, but self-assurance and self-esteem, to whom it did not occur that he would be rejected. Marriage to Alicia was not prompted by love, but by the prospect of excitement and new adventure. He thought of her as a child in terms of experience and that he would enjoy showing her what it was to live in his world. According to his plans,

. . . Va a ser algo nuevo viajar con ella, enseñarle a vestirse, hacerla disfrutar de comodidades que no conoce, y en fin, descubrir su intimidad, tan cerrada; oírle la confesión del cariño que me ha tenido toda la vida, . . . (page 760).

De Arco was not crushed, not even particularly disappointed

by Alicia's refusal. As he sat listening to her demands,

De pronto experimentó una extraña repulsión por aquella mujercita de ojos de loca a la que no le parecía conocer, y que volvía a aquel ridículo usted de siempre al dirigirse a él (page 784).

After Alicia's fiery departure from the inn, De Arco felt ill, but only from over-eating. Two months later De Arco married one of the widows he knew. It was a very quiet affair, "Todo se llevó a cabo de manera muy sencilla y discreta . . . Ni siquiera hubo noviazgo" (page 786).

De Arco's problems were apparently solved and since, "Todo su vida De Arco había detenido los impulsos filantrópicos que de cuando en cuando la acometían" (page 785), it was not probable that his conscience was disturbed by thoughts of either Alicia or poor doña Ana.

El piano, like El noviazgo, is considered by the author as one of her best short novels and is also included in her volume, Mis páginas mayores. Professor Rodolfo Cardona of Chatham College, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has included it in his book Novelistas españoles de hoy as one of four short novels which introduce the reader to some of the finest literary work of modern Spain. The author includes more description in this novel than in many of her writings, which background serves to contrast or to intensify the mood of the character. She describes the deserted, dusty, burning-hot plaza at mid-day and the shabby lodgings

that surround it as she begins this story of the turbulent emotional struggle experienced by the protagonist, Rosa, a girl with courage, strength, and optimism in the face of poverty, illness, and family conflicts. As in several other writings of Carmen Laforet, nature is the balm that heals tension. Rosa takes a "vacation" from the office and wanders like a vagabond through the park in the sunshine on the day she faces a traumatic experience in her life, the loss of her grand piano.

Rosa had not been accepted by the neighborhood but this did not seem to concern her, if she was ever aware that this was true. The people could not understand why a man so handsome as her husband, Rafael, would marry a girl "tan flaca . . . y tan fea" and when she went to work they concluded that he was ". . . un cordero para ella . . . que no están casados . . ." They were indignant that a woman ". . . con aquella cara lavada, con aquel aire sencillito . . . ¡se atrevía a fumar!", a woman whose husband had no vices. (page 791). But in truth, the thing the entire neighborhood found insufferable in Rosa was

. . . aquel aire de felicidad perpetua, aquella especie de reto de su sonrisa, como si fuera distinta de todos, como si a ella no le rozara la miseria, ni el dolor, ni la angustia . . . Y era tanto más imperdonable, cuanto que era pobre, pobrísima (page 792).

After a grand piano was installed, the neighbors began to treat the couple with more respect. The comments among

them were typical, "Yo siempre lo dije. Siempre dije que eran gente de mucha altura . . ." It was inexplicable but the piano seemed to give ". . . a toda la calle . . . un aire de señorío . . ." (page 794).

Fabio, the five-year-old son, also had problems in the neighborhood, where he was known as el gallina or el santito because his mother would not allow him to play with the other children. Sometimes Rosa reproached herself because she knew this was difficult for her child, but she could not approve of the bloodthirsty games the children played. Here the author takes an opportunity to express her views about present-day morals in the thoughts of Rosa, who remembered that in her childhood days it was undesirable to be the bandit. Everyone wanted to be the hero, who was good, just, and honest. The young and innocent were always saved. Times had changed:

Ahora el héroe era el pirata o el "gangster", y . . . los malvados y ridículos, los policías . . . Desaparecía la caballerosidad. Lo importante era conseguir dinero . . . (page 800).

In the face of a difficult childbirth and lack of money for good care, Rosa kept on smiling. When her child became critically ill with meningitis and Rafael, her husband, was seriously ill shortly after, Rosa carried on her daily work at the office and her nightly vigil with the help of one faithful servant, Luisa. When a neighbor greeted her by saying, "¿Se encuentra mal, señorita Rosa? . . . cuando vienen malos tiempos todo parece que agobia más . . .",

Rosa looked at her in surprise and said, "¡Ah! . . . Los malos tiempos . . . Bueno, no sé . . . (page 797).

This story is the glorification of the character, Rosa, but more important than this is the development of a sound philosophy of life that emerges from Rosa's and Rafael's resolution of their conflict over their different sense of values.

The author uses the piano to represent wealth, material possessions, and a luxurious way of life, the things that Rafael longed for. Rosa knew that, "Rafael deseaba ser rico y famoso un día y a ello le parecía consagrar su vida" (page 801) and this made Rosa feel slightly guilty because,

Suavemente, casi sin querer, sin que Rafael se diese cuenta, ella había ido limando las ambiciones de aquel hombre . . . Alimentándolas con palabras, y limándolas, al mismo tiempo, con su falta de deseo de que se realizaran . . . (page 801).

Rafael had left his home town and a good future in his father's business to go to the city to become a writer. He made this break with his family and with Rosa, who had been his childhood sweetheart, when a story he wrote for a magazine won a first prize in a contest. At this point "El no quería fama, sino dinero. Le gustaban las cosas bellas, las mujeres elegantes, los automóviles silenciosos . . ." (page 802) and he thought this first success assured him a fortune. He accepted employment in an office that

left free hours to write, but instead of wealth he experienced una heroica pobreza. He changed his literary style according to the thinking of his circle of intellectuals in the café, but no one took him seriously. He was too young and handsome to demand either fear or respect, so he was told, and it was suggested he seek a career in the boxing ring or movies.

At this time he again met Rosa, who had come to the city to attend the university. This thin and homely girl had been most successful, ". . . era fea. Pero quizás en no saberlo residía aquel encanto que le encontraban los que la trataban" (page 807). She had a wide circle of friends who loved and admired her. She had no particular goal. She planned to finish her course and then see "qué pasaba en la vida" (page 803). Rosa was also having financial difficulty. She was an orphan and dependent upon a wealthy aunt, who had raised her as a daughter. She quarreled with her aunt because she wanted her independence. In Rosa's own words, "Yo no estoy enfadada con ella . . . Sólo que no quiero vivir en su casa, porque aquello es un aburridero" (page 803). The result of this conflict with her aunt, la tía Micoela, was loss of the house and wealth that could have been hers if she had been willing to remain in the home. But Rosa would have preferred to die of hunger, and she was happy in spite of poverty. She was frightened to

realize there were people who would have been willing to lose ". . . lo más hermoso de la vida, la juventud, la alegría" in order to inherit that house full of furniture, china, silver, and servants (page 809). Rafael could never understand this, Rosa knew, although he loved her ". . . por haberle llevado las manos vacías, la despreocupación del porvenir y la sonrisa abierta" (page 810).

Rosa believed there were two classes of poor:

Los pobres que lo son a la fuerza y los que, como, nosotros, estamos encantados de serlo, de sentirnos libres siéndolo. Los pobres de espíritu . . . (page 810).

To Rosa "pobre de espíritu" meant a person that,

. . . en nada estima la riqueza . . . Pobre de espíritu, y no "pobre" solamente, porque el pobre de espíritu puede poseer muchos bienes, pero nunca estará sujeto por ellos, nunca los querrá, y en cambio, una persona pobre puede estar sujeta, angustiada, agarrada por riquezas que codicia . . . (page 811).

Rosa also said that the pobres de espíritu might possess riqueza: "son los que, apenas la tienen en sus manos, puedan darla a otros, puedan cambiarla, puedan hacer con ella lo que quieren, porque no la aman y no les da pena perderla" (page 812). To Rosa, the poor in spirit are those who are not really poor for they possess many riches that are not material ones, riches that bring much pleasure but the pursuit of which does not consume all of their time and thought. On the other hand, the truly poor person is one who is consumed by the desire for wealth to the point that nothing

else is important.

These ideas of Rosa were in direct conflict with those of Rafael. Both he and Rosa expected an inheritance from Rosa's aunt Micaela, and some of their most violent quarrels were over the management of this money. On these occasions, "Parecía que Rafael y ella se odiasen" (page 816). Rafael spoke of travel, stops in luxurious hotels, a marvelous house, and to Rosa he would say, "Serás una mujer elegantísima . . . Serás mi orgullo" (page 815). Rosa knew that in those hotels she would not be the pride of Rafael. She was not elegant and never would be because elegance really did not matter to her. When Rosa suggested using some money to help a needy friend, that she was not concerned about leaving her own son a million, Rafael lost all patience and shouted:

Me vas a enfadar, Rosa. No he visto a nadie más irrazonable que tú . . . Por una vez en la vida me vas a obedecer cuando nos llegue esa herencia; por una vez en la vida te protegeré contra esa estupidez innata que tienes . . . (page 816).

Rosa knew that Rafael suffered for lack of a thousand things he wanted,

Quizá llevaba camino de ser pobre de espíritu algún día, pero por ahora no lo era del todo. Y sufría. Porque el deseo de las cosas de la tierra de sufrimiento y es un pequeño infierno que nada apaga. Se sufre siempre (page 812).

Rosa feared wealth because, "Sabía que era muy difícil que sus vidas transcurriesen en aquella divina paz, divina alegría y generosidad que les daba la pobreza" (page 817).

All of this conflict between the two was unwarranted because doña Micaela left Rosa only a beautiful grand piano. By selling all their furniture and removing a partition in the apartment, the couple made room for the piano, and "el piano, que habfa sido tan mal recibido, llegó a hacerse algo así como un símbolo en la casa" (page 818). A pianist gave weekly concerts there and many friends gathered regularly around the piano to enjoy the music. Rosa played it when she came home from the office. All admired its beauty and the charm of the room. Rosa began to take interest in care of the house.

In the midst of this new-found joy, the illnesses of the son Pablo and of Rafael brought real poverty to the family. For the first time there were unpaid bills. In desperation Rosa decided the piano must be sold, "¿Qué importa vender el piano, Rafael? Más bien nos estorba que otra cosa" (page 828). Reluctantly Rafael agreed and the pianist, Jacinto, arranged the sale. The money ". . . fue una bendición" (page 838).

Sale of the piano brought to a climax the conflict of the two personalities. Rosa knew from the worried look on Rafael's face that ". . . él perdía algo que había estimado mucho" (page 812). She did not expect the anguish she felt the day she knew the movers were coming. She could not look at the piano, she did not go to work as

usual, money she should have saved she spent to buy gifts for Rafael, Pablo, and the servant, Luisa. After all these acts of rebellion, she returned home late, but not too late to see the piano carried away as she watched, hidden in the shadows across the street. She confessed all this to Rafael as she suddenly burst into tears upon entering the house:

He estado huyendo de mí misma sin darme cuenta. He estado retrasando, retrasando esta llegada . . . Y al fin, ahora mismo, he alcanzado a ver cómo se llevaban el piano . . . Entonces comprendí, ¿sabes?, que era de eso de lo que he estado huyendo toda la mañana. De verlo sacar de casa. . . . Soy ridícula . . . Pero ¿no entiendes? Alrededor de él, nuestra vida parecía haberse asentado . . . la vida empezó a adquirir una especie de solidez (pages 831-832).

To which words Rafael replied:

¿Qué importa el piano ni nada de lo que podamos tener? Importamos nosotros y nuestra alegría y lo que podamos hacer nosotros. . . . Hace seis años que vivo con una mujer divinamente loca. Y la locura acaba por pegarse (page 832).

Rosa had never expected to hear these words from Rafael. She smiled at last and dared to look at the empty room that she found not desolate, but full of joy and light. She began to think, as always, that she had ". . . en su vida de la tierra un poco del reino de los cielos (page 832). Thus through the pain and anxiety that Raphael and Rosa shared, they gained understanding of each other and of themselves. Had Raphael loved Rosa less, it is doubtful he would have been able to change his sense of values so

completely, but through the love and devotion he received he came to know the meaning of el pobre de espíritu. The author skilfully developed this satisfactory ending.

The story La niña, takes its title from the character, Olivia, a seven-year-old orphan who, unknowingly, serves as a mediator in resolving the conflict between Carolina, the true protagonist of the story, and her niece, Asunción, a conflict between a step-mother and the oldest child in the family. Through the story of la niña Olivia, the author also tells the plight of children in the slums who suffer pangs of hunger and the anguish of insecurity.

The main thread of the story involves the life of Carolina; the problems that she faced when she gave up her career and married her brother-in-law, Luis, in order to provide adequate care for seven children who were left without a mother when her sister died in childbirth. Carolina admitted to Asunción, as she told her the true story behind the marriage, that actually she did not do it for the sake of the children. Although she loved them very much, she did it because she thought it was a task God expected her to do. To Asunción she said:

Lo hice porque pensé que en aquel momento era la tarea que Dios pedía de mí. La más hermosa, callada y buena tarea a hacer por su Amor . . . (page 878).

Carolina, when she was a young girl, had rebelled against her family ties and had left home to earn money to follow

a medical career. She began her career with brilliant success. However, at the end of the Civil War she renounced this career to become a nun because she felt ". . . una súbita e inesperada necesidad de consagrarse a Cristo en sus pobres . . ." (page 837). She was happily engrossed in this work when her sister became ill during pregnancy and, in spite of all the care that she and the husband Luis could provide, died when twin sons were born. Carolina arranged for care of the young children in a government home for children and for a housekeeper to care for the oldest girl Asunción and for the home, "¡Pero esta casa resultaba un desastre!" (page 877). There were a number of housekeepers, who were badly paid because the earnings of Luis were small compared with the cost of living. They robbed the house, and left it and Asunción dirty and unkept. They even mistreated the child, but there was no money to put in a boarding-school. It was at this point that Carolina was faced with a decision that would affect the rest of her life. In the words of the author, ". . . en vez de meterse monja, como pensaba, se casó con su cuñado . . ." (page 838). She was in conflict with self-interest as opposed to sense of duty. She loved her work as a nurse but she felt an obligation to her sister's children, whom she also loved. She did not love Luis, "Jamás nos quisimos como dos enamorados . . ." (page 876).

but, in spite of this, she decided to change her plans for her life. She told Luis that for the sake of the children they ought to marry. To Asunción, Carolina explained:

Tu padre hizo el sacrificio de aceptarme, con mis manías, y yo le acepté con las suyas. . . . Creo que después de pasar los años peores luchando como negros para vivir y para daros de comer, ahora empezamos a sentirnos un poco descansados, y estamos contentos . . . (page 877).

The task Carolina had undertaken had cost her much personal pain. Of the bedroom she shared with Luis she thought, "Este cuarto es mi 'sufridero'." She remembered the deep anguish she had suffered during those first weeks,

. . . en que dormir junto a Luis, oyendo su respiración. . . . Ella había pasado terribles insomnios . . . levantándose, despacio, a medianoche para ver si los gemelos . . . estaban bien. . . . Aquella prueba fue terrible. No había pensado en ella, la verdad, cuando propuso ella misma a su cuñado . . . (page 848).

She had thought she would have a little room of her own, but there was no space and she did not even propose it. She was so busy during the day that she fell asleep as soon as she hit the pillow. She became used to the situation, but she thought as she reminisced:

Nadie más que Dios sabía lo que la había costado acostumbrarse, lo que le había costado dejar de pensar en ella misma definitivamente, olvidarse siempre . . . (page 848).

It was because Carolina had resolved this conflict with herself and had been able to forget herself entirely that she was prepared to face the conflicts with her husband and with her niece, Asunción.

Actually her conflicts with Luis had been minor. They concerned her many preoccupations and particularly the one that was known by her family as la manfa de los hospitales. She visited the sick regularly and was particularly concerned with the hospital where she had worked as a novice and where now she was privileged to go and come as she liked. Her interest in this work meant that she was sometimes late for meals and that she occasionally forgot to do the tasks Luis had left for her. He depended upon her to proofread the scientific articles he wrote, before they went to the printers. Both the inconvenience of waiting for meals and the delay in sending materials to the printer was a source of annoyance to Luis, but he was a patient man and overlooked these faults in view of the great responsibility that Carolina took for his family. As he defended her against the accusations of Asunción he realized that

El no creía perfecta a Carolina. También él se impacientaba con sus distracciones y con sus genialidades . . . Conocía mejor que sus hijos las pocas disposiciones de Carolina para el hogar. Pero, precisamente por eso, él, Luis tenía con ella una deuda de gratitud, que pocos maridos pueden tener con sus mujeres (page 864).

Carolina was concerned with pleasing Luis, and, when she had failed to do so, "La alegría había desaparecido de los ojos azules de aquella mujer . . ." (page 847).

The crisis in the conflict between Carolina and Asunción came when Carolina was late for lunch on two consecutive days because she was involved in trying to arrange for care of la niña, a fact the family did not know. Carolina had sensed the animosity of Asunción for some time but the warning of open conflict came on the day that Carolina was not only late to lunch, but had forgotten to correct Luis' proofs. When Carolina announced she must hurry to do them at once because ". . . tu padre es lo primero . . .", Asunción replied "¿Papá lo primero? . . . ¿Estás segura de que mi padre es para ti lo primero?" Carolina asked her to explain her remark and she answered:

Te digo eso porque mi padre es un hombre solo, un hombre que está abandonado, mientras tú te dedicas a tus beaterías y a tus hospitales. . . . Lo olvidas todo . . . Todo lo que sea de él Y después te pasas las horas muertas en la iglesia . . . me atrevo a decirte que mi madre fue infinitamente más cariñosa con él, completamente distinta . . . (pages 846-847).

Carolina felt that she would dissolve into tears in the face of this outburst of accusations, but she maintained her composure.

Asunción's attitude came to the attention of the father the next day. When Carolina was again late to lunch, Asunción remarked to her father that all husbands did not tolerate the things he allowed Carolina to do. Luis was a handsome, intelligent and kind man who "Con sus hijos era

bondadosísimo" (page 862), but he would not permit this criticism of Carolina. When he came to her defense, Asunción began to cry. She finally said she had given the matter much thought, and that she wished to leave home because "No quiero vivir más aquí, aguantando a esa mujer" (page 863). Luis pointed out that Carolina had loved and cared for her, but Asunción declared: "Carolina no quiere a nadie. No es una mujer de carne y hueso, es un mamarracho insensible, . . . (page 863).

At this critical moment Carolina arrived with la niña, Olivia, a dirty, unkept, child, whose mother was dying in the hospital. The mother had asked Carolina to make arrangements for the child and this Carolina planned to do. The child, unseen, was sent to the kitchen and Carolina joined the family in time to hear the hysterical accusations of Asunción, her demand to be allowed to leave home, and her final outburst directed to Carolina:

. . . De ti no quiero nada, ¿sabes? Es él el que tiene que decidir. Tú, en mí no tienes ningún derecho. No soy tu hija . . . Y me revuelve el estómago oírte decir hija a cada paso, quitándole este título a mi madre (page 866).

Luis was disposed to punish the girl but Carolina, who had been preparing herself for this, and who remembered her own defiance and desire for independence in her youth, sent Asunción to her room to recover.

It was in her room that Asunción encountered Olivia, "Un diablillo sucio y negro se estaba mirando en el espejo del tocador" (page 868). Olivia, after being well-fed and becoming bored in the kitchen, had wandered into Asunción's bedroom and found her crying there. Asunción forgot her own problems in her interest in el diablillo . . . gracioso and decided to give her a bath. The child's screams of fright brought Carolina, who helped rescue Asunción from the struggle with the bath. As the two watched over the child as she slept, Carolina talked with Asunción.

It came as a shock to Carolina to learn that the resentment and animosity that Asunción felt toward her was prompted by a story she had heard from various sources concerning the circumstances of Carolina's marriage to her father. She declared that ". . . me han dado pruebas, pruebas de que mi madre fue desgraciada por tí" (page 874). Carolina had never been aware that the marriage had provoked gossip and malicious comments about her ganas de hombre. She did not know it had been said that the romance began before her sister's death and had hastened it, that she had taken advantage of her sister's illness in order to invade the house. She was unaware that her actions had prompted this public opinion. Actually the community was now in agreement with her nephew Luis, who,

according to Asunción, "Lice que no le importa, que tú has sido muy buena y bien se te puede perdonar tu novela amorosa . . ." (page 874). Carolina became furious, a reaction Asunción had never seen before on the part of her aunt. To admit the truth of the marriage was a painful task for Carolina, but she told Asunción the whole story, as the father had wished her to do. The conversation ended agreeably, as it turned to a serious discussion about plans for la niña. Thus it was mutual concern over Olivia that relieved the tension between Carolina and Asunción and helped to bring peace to the family again. One wonders if the author's own feelings about her step-mother, whom she hated, provided material for this part of the story.

Carolina had found Olivia, dirty and half-starved, living in a filthy and barren apartment in the slum area of the city with Alberto, a vagabond painter. Carolina had befriended her mother, María, when she was visiting patients in the hospital and because, "Había algo en la alta y flaca mujer que inspiraba confianza" (page 843), the woman had asked Carolina to get her child and arrange for her care. Carolina knew nothing about the child, but she had promised a dying woman to do something about her child and so, when Olivia begged, "¡Llévame contigo!", she knew she would be acting as a coward to do otherwise. She could feed Olivia but where would she sleep? She solved this

dilemma with the thought ". . . sin embargo, si Jesús, niño, viniese pidiéndome alberque, yo le daría mi cama y dormiría en el suelo, aunque se enfadase Luis . . ."

(page 862).

Through the story of the life of Olivia, the author reveals the bodily suffering and mental anguish experienced by the children in the slums who not only have inadequate material needs, but often are starved for affection and lack the security of being loved. Olivia's mother, a widow, had eloped with Alberto, a vagabond painter, because she was bored with life in the home of her rigid mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law had described Maria as coarse, impudent, and shiftless, and this was true. Alberto was an alcoholic and was never able to provide for her and Olivia, or a child she had by him. He did not want the responsibility of a family and had not married Maria. After she was seriously burned and sent to a hospital, he arranged for his mother to take their child and wrote to Olivia's grandmother to come for her. Because the letter was not answered, he assumed the grandmother was dead and was planning to leave the child to government officials. This was a threat to her and she begged "¡Yo no quiero ir a la cárcel!" (page 855). However, Olivia liked Alberto and was about to tell Carolina she preferred to stay with him, when she remembered that he

had deceived her so much. He had promised her many things: a doll, food, a new dress, a visit to see her mother, but, after locking her in the house, he was accustomed to return home empty-handed, ". . . aparecía tambaleante y amenazándola de muerte y se quedaba dormido después de vomitar en cualquier sitio. . . . habían sido innumerables las mentiras y decepciones que ella había sufrido de parte de Alberto . . ." (pages 856-57).

Olivia's painful experiences with poor environment and lack of love and attention ended when she became the responsibility of Carolina. As they rode in a taxi to Carolina's house the child said to her thoughtfully: "Mira, aunque tú eres muy fea me gustas mucho, ¿sabes?" (page 861). Olivia's first experience with her new environment was unhappy, however. Her mother, who was accustomed to say that ". . . los castigos no podían con ella" (page 871) because Olivia never shed a tear, would have been shocked to see the tearful child in the arms of Carolina shaking with fright after a bath. She had been accustomed to hunger, solitude, never to play with children her own age, and at six, to have full care of her baby brother. All of this she had endured without emotion, but in the bathtub she began to tremble ". . . como un perrillo asustado", and to shout, "Me voy a quemar . . ." (page 870). Olivia

enjoyed the attention she was receiving, "Sabía que preocupaba a aquellas dos nuevas madres que le habían aparecido e, inconscientemente, quería preocuparles más aun" (page 872).

Olivia's problems were solved when the grandmother arrived in response to Alberto's letter, and took Olivia home to live in the country. She never asked about her mother. She was about to utter the name of Alberto when, looking through the train window at the countryside, she saw ". . . la figura de un caminante, con un atadillo sujeto a un palo . . ." but that was only for an instant, ". . . aquel en que el tren se cruzó con el vagabundo desconocido . . ." (page 896). After that she forgot Alberto forever.

The author develops the story Los emplazados on the premise that at the baptismal festivities of Teresa, the protagonist, the devil, enveloped in red flames, appeared on the stair and was seen to hold up four fingers of one hand, indicating that there were four persons present whom he would meet again in twenty years, "Cuatro emplazados a veinte años . . ." (page 908). According to the author,

El diablo tenía una idea algo confusa de lo que le había llevado allí aquella tarde. Sabía solamente que en aquel bautizo estarían cuatro personas--además de la bautizada--. Y por una serie de circunstancias, que quizá se pudieran aprovechar admirablemente, sabía que estas personas estarían en peligro de caer en sus manos, a lo mejor, en una misma redada y en un mismo día, a veinte años vista (page 910).

As the devil gazed over the crowd he decided the four emplazados would be: Teresa, who was being baptized (page 912); don Nicanor, also called don Nicolás, who in the midst of an argument concerning the priests said, "A ver si hay un día una buena escabechina de ellos y se respira mejor . . ." (page 910), and thus confirmed the devils intuition that this was the man that ". . . claramente le vió morir fusilado junto con el cura de su pueblo, en una tarde sangrienta de revolución" (pages 910-911); Nicolasillo, the nephew of don Nicolás, who was hit in the eye with a pastelillo that a guest threw and the devil failed to catch; and Cornelio, a young soldier who lived on the fourth floor of the house, a braggart and liar. As the devil was leaving he ran into Paquito Suárez Gaya, the two-year-old son of the family on first floor and he knew "Aquel niño también llevaba la señal de los emplazados a veinte años vista!" (page 913). The devil did not know why there was a fifth emplazado but perhaps he would be there ". . . para estropearlo todo. Quizá para contribuir . . ." (page 913).

Under this guise of mystery, suspense, and fantasy, the author develops a story of events that took place in the small isolated mining village, Villa del Robre*, during

*A fictitious village in the province of León which was also a setting in the novel La mujer nueva.

the Spanish Civil War. This is the only story Carmen Laforet has written that deals so directly with men in the service and the effect of the war on civilians. She avoids politics and even goes so far as to state that Teresa, who is a teacher in La Fundación escolar ". . . no pertenecía a ningún partido político y había ganado su puesto por oposición antes de la guerra . . ." (pages 928-929). The setting of the story is on the campus of the school where the nationalists or Franco's forces have encamped, after taking command of the village following the hasty departure of los rojos, the government forces. There the author has assembled the four emplazados just twenty years after the baptism of Teresa. Cornelio Pérez Roger is commander of the troops, his aid is Lieutenant Francisco Gómez Gaya, also known as Pacquito, and among the officers is the bitter and discontented Nicolás González Bombín, the former Nicolásillo who is out to avenge the ruthless assassination of his uncle, don Nicanor, who was shot, along with the village priest, as predicted by the devil.

Teresa had never been seriously disturbed by any events in her life, not even by the fantastic story about her baptism, until she found herself living alone in the teachers' residence, surrounded by the soldiers. The other teachers had fled before los rojos arrived but she preferred

to remain rather than try to join her family in Madrid. Now her conflicts were with her environment, the situation in which she found herself, and she was afraid. Actually,

Teresa no era miedosa, pero aquellos días no eran ordinarios para la vida de nadie. . . . Le habían hablado de violaciones y crímenes cuando entraran las tropas y no se había convencido. No había querido huir con los demás . . . Le parecía que aquella era su casa" (page 928).

Two individuals in particular were involved in Teresa's frightening experiences during the twenty-four hour period following the arrival of the nationalist troops: a leader of the leftist troops, a local miner whose children Teresa had taught, and the young nationalist lieutenant, Francisco Gómez Gaya, known as Paquito. Teresa met Paquito when he came to her door for the key to the school buildings in order to inspect them. Paquito was immediately attracted by her but she acted so frightened as she showed him about that he finally asked: "¿Se asusta de mí?", a question to which she replied, "No, no . . . De usted no tengo miedo" (page 925). When Paquito left her at her house he introduced himself, said he was a lawyer in civil life and added, "Si alguna vez me necesita, ya sabe . . ." (page 926). Teresa was very cordial in her reply, but little did she realize the importance of this offer.

Paquito did not know that Teresa was frightened because the local miner had hidden himself in her house

and had threatened her life with a revolver if she divulged his presence. The miner had failed to escape with his troops and had entered the house to hide there until dark, hoping to escape past the sentries. Not only was Teresa afraid of him but, as she told him: "Aquí, tarde o pronto lo van a descubrir. Nos va a costar la vida a las dos . . ." (page 927). She said this because "Le habían dicho que ocultar a un enemigo era delito de alta traición . . ." (page 930). Teresa was tormented by a conflict of emotions in regard to this man. She would have been enraged at his manner in ordering her to bring food, not to leave the house, not to talk with anyone,

. . . si no hubiese sido por la profunda compasión que aquel tipo le inspiraba. Quizá fuese una compasión suicida. . . Nunca podría considerar enemigo a un hombre cuya vida dependía de ella (page 931).

She had not dared to move about or to go out, ". . . Teresa vivía en ansiedad mortal" (page 931). As Teresa left the house to go with Paquito to show him the buildings, she felt the eyes of the man upon her but,

De pronto sintió una extraña calma. Si el hombre desconfiaba de ella dispararía tan pronto saliese. . . Pero si el hombre tenía una sola probabilidad de escapar era confiando en Teresa, en su silencio misericordioso. Nadie disparó (page 932).

She prolonged the inspection of the buildings because in the presence of Paquito ". . . se sentía segura" (page 933). When she returned to the house she locked herself in her

room until the man called to say he was leaving and requested food. He entered her room while she was in the kitchen and upon her return,

Teresa tuvo un repentino aviso de peligro. . . . ella no veía al hombre ahora. Pero algo había cambiado en su manera de hablar, en el ambiente, en todo . . . Era un peligro distinto del de morir ahogada o atravesada por un balazo el que su instinto le avisaba en el susurro torpón e impaciente del hombre. . . . Es como si se lo hubiera sopladado el demonio (page 939).

Terror seized her as the man advanced toward her. Suddenly he was stopped by three knocks on the door.

Teresa ". . . se sentía a salvo" (page 940). When she answered, it was Paquito. Prompted by terror and a desire to escape, she offered to accompany Paquito to the library to get a book because "Ni por un momento se le ocurrió que aquel joven encantador e infantil pudiese significar otro peligro" (page 940). When, looked in the privacy of the library, Paquito took her in his arms and kissed her, it was anger and indignation that prompted her reaction to slap him, not fear. She was in conflict with the teachings of her childhood and with her own emotions. Remorse followed; she asked Paquito's forgiveness and then said "¿Por qué hiciste eso? . . . sin justificación . . . Hay otra clase de hombres, a los que una tiene miedo . . .", to which Paquito replied, "Y yo no soy esa clase de hombre peligroso . . ." (page 942). She had considered him a

gentleman, she said, and, therefore, ". . . no comprendo por qué pasó aquello" (page 943).

From this point on the conflict between Teresa and Paquito began to resolve. He realized he had misunderstood her motive for locking the library door and closing the shutters. He had thought it was because she wanted to be alone with him, but when she said the aunt who sent her to the university, "Me enseñó a protegerme contra los hombres. . . . Me contaba historias terribles de muchachas solas, asediadas por el deseo de hombres bestiales . . ." (page 944), he knew he was wrong. He realized her actions were prompted by fear because, in spite of his behavior, when he offered to take her home she said: "Tengo miedo de estar allí . . . No te lo puedo explicar . . ." (page 945).

Teresa fell asleep. She awoke two hours later and saw Paquito watching her. Then Teresa

. . . sintió aquel calor profundo en su cuerpo, aquella asombrosa debilidad, que jamás relacionó con el demonio, y que, sin embargo, estaba atizando allí, junto que le hacía arder las orejas--, aquel invisible convidado a su bautizo a quien había llegado la hora de aparecer (page 945).

To Paquito she said: "¿Aún te sientes enamorado?" (page 945). She said this ". . . con una suave chanza, bien segura de la respuesta, y su voz salió apositada y baja". Paquito clasped her hand and ". . . de uno a otro pasó una cálida corriente. Un soplo más del demonio y . . ." (pages 945-946).

Thus the devil interceded in the conflict between Paquito and Teresa and influenced Teresa in her conflict with herself. She awoke in the library at dawn to find herself alone and ". . . se sentía entumecida, enferma. Hizo maquinalmente le señal de la cruz . . ." (page 946). She did not think of Paquito nor of the man in her house but ". . . en aquella buena mujer, su madrina . . . que la había hecho crecer creyente y pura" who had said to her "No amanezcas nunca en pecado mortal . . . No pases el peligro de morir así . . ." (page 946). She thought that, ". . . jamás hasta entonces había amanecido en pecado . . . mientras sentía un miedo a la muerte que jamás le parecía haber experimentado hasta entonces, y que . . . nada justificaba" (page 946).

Teresa was wrong; all her fears of death were justified because, when Paquito returned to camp at mid-day and was ordered to appear in el salón de sesiones, he found her alone in the room with Cornelio who said:

Alférez, aquí le entrego a esta prisionera. Vamos a juzgarla en juicio sumarísimo. Usted, que es abogado, será el juez instructor; . . . voy a reunir el Consejo de Guerra en cuanto coma, y seguramente habrá que fusilarla . . . (page 948).

Paquito was terrified. Up until this point "Aún no conocía bien a Cornelio Roger ni sabía lo que la guerra es" (page 948). He had enjoyed his life in the army. He had not been upset at the prospect of military service.

When he left home,

. . . vivió unos minutos de azoramiento y de intensa tristeza a causa de la pena de su madre. . . pero se sentía compensado por los ojos brillantes de su hermanillo . . . y las sonrisas orgullosas de las hermanas. . . y sintiendo . . . en el espíritu la magnífica certidumbre de estar en armas por una causa que le parecía sagrada . . . el corazón comenzó a latirle exaltado y romántico, con una felicidad como le parecía no haber sentido jamás (page 915).

To the chaplain he had said one day: "Estoy contento.

La guerra es cosa de hombres. ¿No cree usted, padre?"

(page 918). He had been particularly happy during his encampment in an isolated mountain village where he conversed frequently with an old man. In these conversations,

Acumulaba conocimientos y sensaciones como si se estuviese preparando para algo. . . . Ni se le ocurría la posibilidad de que tal vez fuera para morir. La idea de la muerte . . . no entraba para nada en su imaginación, en aquellos días en que la vida era tan rica (pages 919-920).

Paquito's conflicts in life had been with himself. When Teresa had rejected his first attempt to make love to her and had heard the bitterness in his voice when he said, "Y yo no soy esa clase de hombre peligroso" (page 942), he did not know

. . . las luchas que el muchacho llevaba consigo mismo para ser puro, para ser casto, para guardar sus mejores energías dedicándolas al estudio, al deporte, a prepararse a ser un hombre sano y digno (page 942).

Paquito learned that Teresa was accused of hiding a leftist officer in her house and of having a picture of Lenin in her possession. He sent at once for Nicolás Bombin,

who had made the accusation. Thus the four emplazados were together again but ". . . solo un personaje invisible recordaba que se habian encontrado ya otra vez; veinte años antes" (page 950). Nicolás Bombin, who had previously accused Teresa of being a roja perdida (page 926), now based his accusations on the fact that he had seen the leftist officer, shot by the sentinels that morning, running from Teresa's house. Upon searching the place he had found evidence that the man had been sheltered there. The picture was identified as that of Teresa's father and Paquito, using the skill he had acquired in his legal training, quickly established facts as to Teresa's whereabouts that convinced Cornelio she was unaware the leftist was in her house. Nicolás Bombin admitted he had searched Teresa's house upon arrival at the school and found everything in order. He also admitted that he saw Teresa leave with Paquito after ten o'clock that night and that when he rushed into the house the next morning after the leftist fled from it, she was wearing her coat and appeared to have just arrived. Paquito, to the amazement of all, including Teresa, announced that he and Teresa were engaged and had spent that night together. The man must have come in Teresa's absence and fled when he heard her arrive. Paquito asked permission to marry Teresa at once and that

the whole matter not come to the attention of the Council of War because "Va en ello el honor de mi mujer" (page 953). To Cornelio's comment, "Y estuvieron ustedes pelando la pava . . .", Paquito replied "Hasta casi el amanecer, sí . . ." (page 954). Teresa, who had been sobbing when Paquito arrived at the court, looked at him with admiration and toward Cornelio with relief because he said: "Me alegro mucho de que no haya Consejo de Guerra. Podré dormir la siesta . . ." (page 955).

Cornelio had a more important reason to be relieved that the Council of War did not meet because, at the appointed hour, there was an explosion that demolished the building. As he said to Paquito later "Si el Consejo de Guerra llega a efectuarse, a esta hora ninguno de los cuatro que estuvimos por la mañana en el salón de sesiones existiríamos . . ." (page 958).

Thus, in spite of the meddling of the devil, the story ended happily with all the conflicts solved. Cornelio celebrated their good fortune by asking the three to dine with him. At the table, "Teresa contó incluso-- animada al fin por reacción y por unas copitas de champaña --la historia de su bautizo . . .", a story which all of them had heard before and about which they agreed with Paquito when he said: "¡Me parece, Teresa, que es un cuento popular que tu familia te aplicó a ti! . . ."

(page 959). So the story of los emplazados came to a close without any of the four recognizing they had been the participants and that their appointment with the devil had been fulfilled. The situations in the story are contrived but the reactions of the characters are realistic.

El viaje divertido is the story of the traumatic experiences of Elisa López when she accompanied her sister-in-law Rosa to Madrid to attend the wedding of Antonio, the younger brother of her husband, Luis. Elisa's conflicts were primarily with her husband and his family and with her own cousin Javier, but her reaction to these pressures resulted in self-conflict because of her feelings of inadequacy and her consequent lack of security and self-respect.

Elisa, at twenty, was the wife of the young village doctor and the mother of two small children. Her parents, who had been wealthy farmers with a large estate, had been robbed and assassinated during the Spanish Civil War. Elisa was only four at the time. Someone had come to the house one night and asked her parents to accompany them to identify the bodies of two young men that were presumed to be her brothers. Elisa was left alone to wait until they returned for her. The child became frightened and called to the neighbor, Rosa, who rescued her and hid her in her own house. Later the men returned, searched

the house, and burned all the contents of her father's office. The parents' bodies were found the next day. Rosa fled with the child to Burgos where she lived until the end of the war. Rosa and her husband José kept Elisa and raised her as their own daughter. Elisa had had a happy life with Rosa and memory of her terrifying experience did not seem to have disturbed her; in fact, she had not been able to provide any information concerning the identity of the persons who had come for her parents. Later, Elisa had married Rosa's brother, Luis, and the young couple had come back to the village to live in the big house of the López family. There Luis was struggling to establish a practice as a physician. Elisa's wealth was gone but this was apparently no real problem to her. A cousin, Javier, claimed to have purchased her father's land during the war and to have paid cash, money that was presumably sought and taken by the assassins of her parents. Elisa was content to be in her old home, she loved her husband, and was a devoted slave to her two young children. In fact, "A Elisa podía vérsela siempre con el pequeño gordinflón en brazos y la niña agarrada al borde de su vestido, lloriqueando de celos" (page 966).

Elisa would have been happy if it were not for the fact she knew her husband was dissatisfied with her ability to perform the duties of a wife and mother. He considered

her a child who had nothing to do and whom he must look after and direct. When he arrived home at night he was accustomed to say "Hija, vengo reventado. . . . Tí, como gracias a Dios no haces nada, no puedes comprender este cansancio" (page 965). Because the children kept Elisa busy during the day, she was accustomed to sew at night and often fell asleep with her needle in her hand and her head on the table. If Luis discovered her sleeping he would awaken her and say, "No tienes nada que hacer en todo el día y escoges estas horas, para volverte anémica de falta de sueño." If she tried to explain that the children kept her busy during the day he would reply, "A los niños se los educa. No saques al pequeño de la cuna más que a sus horas" (page 966). In regard to her management of the servant Luis said, "Le diré a Rosa que . . . te dé algunas lecciones de ciencia doméstica . . . Las necesitas" (page 968). Luis had no sympathy with Elisa's reluctance to leave her little daughter with him and the old family servant while she attended the wedding of the brother of Luis. He felt it was her duty to go with his sister, Rosa, since for professional reasons he could not, and to her he said, ". . . no vayas a hacer el ridículo con tus tristezas" (page 970). Later he said to his brother-in-law, José, the husband of Rosa:

A mí no me importa nada que mi mujer vaya sola de viaje . . . Si algo le hace falta a Elisa es sacudirse un poco esa preocupación, casi enfermiza, por los niños. Te confieso que a mí también me hace falta descansar un poco de ella y de sus eternas alarmas por las criaturas. Que se divierta todo lo que quiera . . . Si es que sabe . . . Porque, conociéndola, lo dudo (pages 971-972).

As Luis sat alone in the dining room at breakfast after Elisa's departure, he recalled his insistence that they eat all their meals there, although Elisa preferred the bedroom for breakfast because it was warmer. But Luis' hope was to ". . . educarla y dotarla de cierto refinamiento en las costumbres" (page 177). Later in the story when Luis became angry with Rosa and his young niece Daniela because he thought they had made Elisa feel inadequate and unhappy as she compared herself to them,

No se le ocurrió pensar en sus rifas nocturnas, en el papel de censor- educador, que desde que se había casado había temido el respecto a Elisa, y que a ella había acabado por atemorizarla y quitarle toda sensación de autoridad o de valía personal (page 994).

Elisa had been aware of this conflict with her husband since the beginning of their marriage. This had resulted in a feeling of inferiority and dissatisfaction with herself.

In the words of the author:

Desde su boda, Elisa vivía como asustada, temerosa de ser mala esposa, mala ama de casa, mala madre. Una continua preocupación la acompañaba desde que despertaba en su gran cama de matrimonio. A veces, esta sensación estaba como soterrada, se había acostumbrado tanto a ella, que la encontraba natural. Otras veces se imponía con gran fuerza, haciendo que su corazón se contrajese (page 974).

Early in the morning, when the rest of her family was sleeping, Elisa "había un momento secreto, un momento en que . . . se sentía más firme que todos aquellos seres dormidos. . . . En aquel momento Elisa comprendía su gran importancia como eje vital de aquella casa, su gran tarea" (page 965). However, after Luis arrived home and began his customary criticisms,

Aquella de la noche era una hora mala, una hora de debilidad y angustia. Era el momento del día en que Elisa se sentía inútil, poco trabajadora y hasta mala madre. Era el momento de la jornada en que se comparaba . . . con su cuñada . . . una mujer "de verdad", como decía su marido, tranquila, serena . . . a quien ella admiraba sin poder imitar. . . . Cuando . . . se metía en la gran cama matrimonial estaba siempre muy cansada, y casi le dolían los ojos de contenerse las lágrimas (page 966).

As Elisa rode in the coach beside Rosa on their way to a near-by village to take the train to Madrid, "A Elisa se le empezó a quitar la sensación oprimente que había tenido todos aquellos días al pensar en el viaje" and she began to feel happy and secure, just as she had felt when a child riding beside Rosa on the way to boarding-school. Only now Rosa talked with her as an equal, which ". . . resultaba delicioso. Aquella sensación de malestar, de preocupación continua, se fundía con facilidad, después de tres años. Ella no sabía en que consistía el alivio que experimentaba . . ." (page 974). Elisa found herself laughing at the antics of the coachman, and she thought:

Qué fácil es vivir, Dios mío, qué fácil . . . A veces me parece una cosa tan cansada . . . Pero es sólo porque siempre he tenido a alguien observando todo lo que yo hago para criticarlo . . . Después de esta profunda observación psicológica que se hizo a sí misma, Elisa se durmió . . . (page 976).

Thus the beginning of this trip was truly for Elisa el viaje divertido as she began to have some insight into her conflict with herself.

The trip, which was the first time Elisa had been away from home since their marriage, also began to have an effect on the attitude of Luis. Luis was not yet thirty but his face was lined and "Tenía los ojos tristes, insatisfechos" and his brother-in-law, José, had the idea he was not happy with his marriage. As they walked along the street, following the departure of their wives, José asked Luis why he had married Elisa and the reply of Luis confirmed José's suspicions:

Más pronto o más tarde, un hombre tiene que casarse, ¿no? . . . Vosotros me metisteis a Elisa por los ojos. Y, aparte de que es demasiado buena para mí, no tengo nada que decir de ella . . . Sí, me alegro de que haga un viaje divertido . . . (page 972).

However, in the absence of his wife, Luis began to think about Elisa more and "No sabía por qué, le costaba mucho menos trabajo imaginarla como una niñita que pensar en ella tal como era ahora. Y . . . ¿cómo era en realidad? . . . Sabía que no podría confundirla con nadie, pero no podía acordarse exactamente de sus facciones cuando no estaba

junto a ella" (pages 980-981). He really became thoughtful and concerned when he received a letter from Elisa in which she said that his relatives were surprised to learn she was the mother of two children ". . . con la poca formalidad que tuve siempre". As a result of thinking of this she wrote: ". . . quizá me debería de haber preparado un poco más antes de casarme para poder hablar contigo de todas las cosas que a ti te interesan y no decepcionarte." She went on to say that beside his niece Daniela, who was Elisa's age and was attending the university, ". . . me siento vieja y paleta" (pages 992-993). It did not occur to Luis that his constant criticism of her might have been partially responsible for these feelings that Elisa expressed. Instead he was furious at Rosa and Daniela, whom he assumed had criticized her and made her unhappy. His thoughts continued:

Luis imaginó mentalmente una respuesta cariñosa. No era muy difícil decirle a Elisa, que ella era la más dulce y buena de las mujeres para él. Que la quería tal como era, y que volviese pronto porque contra lo que pensaba la casa resultaba vacía sin ella, y triste. No sólo no era difícil esto, sino que era verdad. . . . (page 994).

However, Luis felt ridiculous about expressing these thoughts to his wife because it did not seem fitting for a man to be so sentimental and so the letter was never written. Instead, "Luis se marchó sonriente. . . . Las manos en los

bolsillos y en una de las manos el calor de la carta de Elisa, a la que, por fin, no juzgó necesario contestar" (page 995).

In the meantime, Elisa's situation had developed into anything but a happy one because of her relationship with Rosa and with her own cousin Javier. While travelling on the train to Madrid, Elisa suffered the most terrifying experience of her life since the night her parents were taken away, about which she had only vague memories. As she was walking down the aisle of the train she saw in one of the compartments a face that she recognized:

. . . una cara y unos brillantes ojos negros, que se inclinaban hacia ella. . . Inconfundible la expresión de aquellos gruesos labios, inconfundible aquella barbilla partida, los ojos saltones y, sobre todo, mucho más que eso, inconfundible aquel gesto medio cruel, medio tranquilizador (page 983).

Elisa became pale as she imagined she heard again the words of that man: "Luego volveremos, nena. . . Si gritas, vendrá el hombre negro del saco a llevarte . . . Tí, quietecita hasta que yo vuelva. ¿Ente ndido?" The man spoke to her and this time he said "--¿Que te pasa, prima Elisa? Parece como si te hubieras asustado al verme . . ." (page 983). Elisa could not answer for she fainted and fell into the arms of a fellow-passenger. When she opened her eyes and the man smiled at her, she was on the verge of telling him that the cause of her alarm was a mistake when she noticed ". . . la mano del hombre, adornada con

una sortija pesada. Una sortija que a ella le parecía haber visto cuando aquella mano dura se retiró de su barbilla aquel día . . ." (page 984). It was like a nightmare. Then she heard Rosa ask if it was possible she did not remember Javier and Javier replied: "--Yo soy tu primo Javier. Te administraba la finca que tu marido me la vendió . . ." Elisa was concerned about the way the man smiled at Rosa. It was a different smile than she remembered and " Parecía como si entre Rosa y Javier existiera un secreto" (page 985).

Hours of anguish followed for Elisa as she tried to sleep but could not because of thoughts of that horrible night when her parents went away and the feeling that her cousin Javier was among those who came for them. She thought: "Si aquel hombre, su primo Javier, pensaba volver a la casa después de asesinar a los padres, no sería para dejarla a ella vivir" (page 986). Could a man that was only a relative provoke all this torment and ". . . si Javier había comprado las tierras de su padre, Javier podía saber dónde su padre guardaba el dinero" (page 987). Both Javier and Rosa indicated he had visited Rosa's home and seemed surprised that Elisa did not remember this cousin. Elisa remembered she had seen him once beside the well in the garden of Rosa's house where she was playing. He had offered to point out something

marvelous that she could see in the bottom of the well. Suddenly a note in the voice of the man had frightened her and,

Quiso desprenderse de la mano dura que la empujaba y entonces otra se acercó a su boca para cerrarla. Y la otra mano, de eso estaba segura, llevaba una sortija cuadrada, pesada. La sortija del asesino de sus padres, del primo Javier (page 989).

This memory prompted Elisa later to ask Rosa if Javier were a good person and "Sin venir a cuento, Rosa se ruborizó. . . . Durante los dos segundos que Rosa tardó en contestar, Elisa tuvo una tremenda intuición. Tuvo la seguridad pasmosa de que su cuñada Rosa quería a aquel hombre" (page 989). Rosa assured her that Javier was a good man, that he had loved Elisa when she was a child and added "Una vez te salvé de caer a un pozo . . . ¿No te acuerdas?" (page 990). This praise of Javier only intensified Elisa's torment. She kept thinking:

¿Es posible que un ser así, una persona que es mi pariente, a quien trato, con quien hablo, a quien Rosa estima, o quizás hasta quiere . . . es posible que éste, precisamente, sea un asesino? (page 991).

Not only was Elisa upset by her fears and suspicions concerning Javier, but also because of Rosa's interest in him. She loved Rosa as if she were her mother and Rosa ". . . seguía encantadora con su cuñada" (page 996). But her worries continued:

A Elisa sin saber por qué le daba pena y miedo verla tan entusiasmada. . . . A ella también le había

resultado una felicidad inocente y despreocupada este viaje durante el que no tenia que consultar a los ojos de nadie para ver si estaba bien o mal hecho lo que a ella se le habia ocurrido en cada momento . . . Pero esa alegría y despreocupación se le habia quitado tan pronto, que le parecia vivir en plena pesadilla (pages 996-997).

Elisa knew that Rosa went shopping every morning but it was Daniela who told Elisa that "Javier y Rosa tomaban juntos el aperitivo, todos los días. . . ." She wanted to protect Rosa and herself ". . . contra aquel hombre horrible y no sabia qué hacer ni qué decir" (page 997).

The day of the wedding her mother-in-law, doña Rosalia, found Elisa sobbing in her room. Elisa had known her mother-in-law, "aquella dulce y risueña mujer" (page 996) for many years and had been treated as a daughter, even before her marriage to Luis. Doña Rosalia persisted in asking why Elisa seemed terrified in the presence of Javier and finally Elisa said "--Creo haber reconocido en él el asesino de mis padres" (page 1001). Doña Rosalia, who was very upset by these words replied, "--Olvídate de eso, niña mía . . . Yo creo que no es verdad lo que crees. No, no es verdad . . ." (page 102), but she seemed very quiet and sad. Finally, she said she would have to tell Rosa, for only Rosa would know if Javier had been, on the day of the assassination, in the village where Elisa's parents lived.

Elisa's conflict with Rosa began when she spoke to Rosa about going out with Javier so often. She had done this because she was concerned about ". . . la carifiosa complicidad que habfa entre Rosa y Javier." Well she remembered "el feroz enfado que habfa demostrado Rosa apenas habfa ella intentado 'meterse' en sus cosas" (page 999). It was because of their quarrel that doña Rosalia had found Elisa crying. Elisa was concerned when Rosa did not appear at the party following the wedding, for she was sure it was because doña Rosalia had told her about Elisa's suspicions. Rosa did come to Elisa's room immediately after the party and threw herself on the bed saying

--Estoy enferma-- . . . Ha sido demasiado para mí . . . Mi madre me ha dicho tus sospechas. . . .
Perdóname lo de esta mañana. Lo de estos días . . .
No hacfa nada malo, pero no debí salir jamás con Javier. El viaje se me subió a la cabeza (pages 1003-04).

After this Rosa did not seem like Rosa, "Estaba vieja" and Elisa felt guilty because she was sure that ". . . esta asustada confianza de Rosa iban envueltas muchas mentiras." Elisa would have given anything to be the same girl who left on this trip a few days before and "Por ver la cara de Rosa, segura, impenetrable, como siempre". Rosa went on to say to Elisa: "Quiero decir que creo a Javier capaz hasta de ser un ladrón . . . Pero no de ser

un asesino . . .", and then she added, "De todas maneras es un hombre malo . . ., ¿sabes?" (page 1004). Rosa admitted she had held memories of their courtship, and she was attracted by him. However, he had not only made a scene at the party because she did not appear but, she told Elisa: "Dice que nos desacreditará en el pueblo. No se atreverá . . ." (page 1005).

Elisa's conflict with Rosa began to be resolved with Rosa's revelation of her relationship with Javier. Elisa knew that in what Rosa was saying: "Una sola cosa, certísima: las relaciones de Rosa con Javier habían terminado. Cualesquiera que hubiesen sido . . . Se acabaron" (pages 1005-06). Once again she asked Rosa if she was absolutely sure Javier had neither robbed nor assassinated her parents. There was a brief silence ". . . en el que Rosa entró muy adentro en su conciencia. Luego mintió: --Estoy segura. Júrame que no pensarás más en esto. Que no se lo dirás a Luis" Elisa's voice sounded so relieved when she said "No pensaba haberlo dicho en ningún caso. ". . . Rosa . . . se sintió contenta de haberla liberado de aquella carga, que ella ahora llevaría sobre sus hombros para siempre". Thus the conflict between Elisa and Rosa ended as Rosa said "Te he querido como a una hija, ¿sabes? . . ." (page 1006), and Elisa's fear of Javier was alleviated.

The relationship between Elisa and Luis also appeared likely to improve in spite of the rumors spread by Javier in the village that both she and Rosa were drunk at the party following the wedding and danced the can-can. José was disturbed and furious, but Luis laughed so hard that ". . . le asomaban lágrimas a los ojos sólo de imaginarse a Rosa y Elisa bailando el can-can and he said to José: "Por mucho que lo piense, no puedo imaginarme a Elisa como no sea con un niño cogido en un brazo y otro colgando de sus faldas . . ." (pages 1007-08). Suddenly ". . . aquellas ideas de la carta de Elisa penetraron en el cerebro de Luis . . ." Elisa had thought of her sister-in-law's gay life at the university. Could it be that Elisa's life wasn't happy? Luis nervously began to consider all the advantages of Luisa's life. She had children, a husband, no worry about earning a living. He wondered if this was enough for her, "Quizás, a pesar de todo, quería más" (page 1008). Luis found Elisa changed on her return: "Estaba juvenil y encantadora . . . tan segura de sí misma, tan candorosa . . ." and suddenly ". . . se desconcertó y sintió unos ridículos y rabiosos celos al verla así. No sabía de quién tenía celos, ésta es la verdad. Pero los sentía" (page 1009). Later, when Elisa became indignant with him, a reaction she had never shown before, Luis ". . . se sintió desarmado." To her question

"¿Por qué esta broma estúpida . . .?" he replied "No sé: fue un pronto . . . Me fastidiaba pensar que yo había estado aquí solo, aburrido, y tú te habías divertido tanto . . ." Elisa replied only "--¡Estúpido!", as she thought of her days of fear and suffering, but she said it "con tanta dulzura, que se sintió Luis animado . . . y volverse a abrazar a su mujer . . ." (page 1010).

Thus the reader feels that Elisa's life with Luis is going to be far different as a result of the influence of el viaje divertido, that was not a happy trip but seems to have brought about a happy ending to the conflicts and misunderstanding that existed between the two. The author presents realistically the problems of a young wife and mother, the feelings of insecurity and inadequacy; problems that would be typical for the young, uneducated wife of a professional man. The solution of these seems logical and satisfactory. It seems improbable that a young woman like Elisa would have been able to keep secret her suspicions concerning Javier, but the author explains this by the fact Elisa felt fear and not desire for revenge and that Rosa, whom she loved and longed to protect, had requested secrecy.

CHAPTER IV

REALISTIC TREATMENT OF EMOTIONAL CONFLICTS IN THE SHORT STORIES

The short stories of Carmen Laforet are the "slices of life" to which some of her critics have referred. Some of them are characterizations, others are vivid pictures of brief and passing moments in life, cuadros de la vida. All of them portray deep, disturbing emotions evoked by everyday occurrences among the common people of the average and low-income families.

In the story, La muerte,⁴⁸ el señor Paco's life had been dreary because of his struggle against both the emotional deprivations and the financial need brought on by the costly illness of his wife, María, over a period of twenty years. His conflicts were both inter-personal and environmental. He had not felt concern for María's suffering however, but rather for his own hardship with the loss of a comfortable home and the close companionship of his wife. Added to this was the resentment he had felt against his shiftless and quarrelsome daughters. He had reacted against his problem, not by solicitation and love

⁴⁸Laforet, Novelas, op. cit., pp. 261-344. All the short stories discussed in this chapter are within these pages.

for his wife, toward whom he felt his obligation was fulfilled by providing money for medicine, nor by asserting his authority with his children and demanding consideration for their mother. Rather he had resorted to self-pity and felt that no one could reproach him for the money spent on wine or the hours of pleasure with a neighborhood widow. Thus he had thought:

Nadie podría reprochárselo con una mujer enferma siempre y dos hijas alborotadas y mal habladas como demonios. Nadie se lo había reprochado jamás. Ni la pobre María . . . ni su propia conciencia. Cuando las lenguas de sus hijas se desataron en alguna ocasión más de lo debido, la misma María había intervenido desde su cama . . . suavemente, pero con firmeza. En la soledad de la alcoba, cuando algunas noches había estado él, mal humorado, inquieto, . . . María misma lo había compadecido--¡Pobre Paco! (page 266).

Paco had even gone so far as to believe María did not suffer because she did not complain and when one suffers one complains, "Y cuando uno sufre se queja. Eso lo sabe todo el mundo . . ." (page 267). This was a typical escape mechanism from his own conscience. Both Paco and his daughters in the struggle against the mother's illness remained selfish to the end. Paco, who had to give up the hope of a new marriage with the widow when his wife enjoyed a temporary improvement in health, ceased to rebel and became unconcerned, an attitude he assumed even at the time of her death. "El señor Paco se portó decentemente en su entierro, con una cara afligida. Pero al volver del

cementerio ya la habia olvidado" (page 268). The daughters continued to quarrel and complain, to neglect the household tasks, and to keep the home in an uproar, during the lifetime of their mother who ". . . nunca, ni en su agonía, pudo gozar de paz" (page 267).

María, on the other hand, was always a patient, tolerant, sacrificing mother, unmindful of herself, uncomplaining about her illness, thoughtful and concerned about her family. She showed no resentment against the treatment she received but accepted it patiently, ". . . aquella boca pálida donde siempre flotaba la misteriosa e irritante sonrisa . . ." (page 267). Her conflict was not against her illness as it affected her, but as it deprived her family of a normal life. She gave her medicine money for the needs of her grandchildren. Between illnesses she helped her lazy, quarrelsome daughters put the filthy house in order. In this character Laforet extols the sacrifice of motherhood and the important influence of the mother in the home, both before and after death. Of the mother she said:

La noche antes de morir, sin poder ya incorporarse en la cama, María hilvanaba torpemente el trajecillo de un nieto . . . Y, como de costumbre, no pudo hacer nada para impedir las discusiones habituales de la familia, en su última día en la tierra (page 268).

The conflict between the two daughters is typical of that between siblings unhampered by parental control, ". . . en

aquella casa descuidada, . . . continuamente, resonaban gritos y discusiones entre las dos hermanas . . . discusiones que eran el escándalo de la vecindad . . ." (page 267). The cause of the quarreling is also typical, a quarrel over which one was responsible for the daily tasks, ". . . pretextando cada una que aquel trabajo urgente le pertenecía a la otra . . ." (page 269).

Ironically enough, the family conflicts in the story were solved with the death of the mother. The daughters stopped their quarreling and shared the work so that the household ran smoothly. Paco, because of her death or perhaps because he was getting old, spent more time at home and even showed affection toward the grandchildren. The kitchen was bright and shining and the meals prepared. The unmarried daughter waited on her brother-in-law while her sister was busy with the children, all of which made the brother-in-law say happily: "--Esto parece otra cosa. ¡Eh, señor Paco?" (page 269).

At the close of the story Paco's conflict is with himself, and the reader feels he suffers remorse as he realizes what good has come out of the uncomplaining and torturous life of María--a realization that prompted him to say, "María era una santa."

Juan Pablo in El veraneo portrays vividly the arrogant, admired, spoiled, and selfish son of an aged and

poverty-stricken mother, a son who allowed his sister to sacrifice her youth and her educational career in order that he might pursue his future in Madrid. Juan Pablo had been proud of his attractive sister, Rosa, who adored him and was willing to give up her plans for a university career at the age of nineteen, and go to an obscure and backward village to teach until Juan Pablo could send for her. In this village she had to face primitive living conditions, rejection by the natives because her ways were different, loneliness, poverty and lack of food, ridicule by her pupils. In spite of all these conflicts with her environment and her unfulfilled longing to be in the city and near her beloved brother, she was not bitter and her confidence in him continued through the years. She rejected her lover, the village doctor, and a life in a near-by fishing village because she was waiting for her brother to send for her. Rosa struggled to till the soil in her garden to provide food, she endured hardships and she won this conflict with her environment. She became loved, respected, and admired by all the village. She had learned to love and enjoy the beauties of the rolling countryside and the sea. She felt no resentment toward her brother, only hurt and disappointment because he was critical of her, her life, and surroundings. Yet he was dissatisfied with his situation in the city.

Juan Pablo's conflict was not against his sister, other than resentment toward her because she had waited for him to send for her, and now he was forced to feel uncomfortable in the face of her unselfish sacrifice. His true conflict was within himself. He had suffered some hunger and discomfort, but not enough to force him to give up his lazy, carefree way of life. Unlike Paco in La muerta, one does not believe that Juan Pablo felt any appreciation of another's sacrifice, nor did he feel remorse, only discomfort. He defended himself with the thought, "Si la chica hubiera tenido fibra de veras, se habria salido del pueblo sin necesidad de ayuda ajena . . ." (page 280). Because he could not face the truth of the situation when he visited her after an illness, he immediately fled back to Madrid. Although Rosa had given up hope of a different life and had apparently found happiness at great cost, Juan Pablo, the weakling, faced a future haunted by the knowledge of his sister's plight, and the realization of his own inadequacy. He felt anger and irritation against the doctor who told her story, and only regret for himself, "Ahora veía a Rosa siempre acusándole con sus ojos mansos" (page 280).

In La fotografia one senses the anguish, hardship, and struggle brought on by the Spanish Civil War, which separated a young couple, Leonor and Sebastián, after four

years of marriage, years during which they had struggled against poverty and had suffered the loss of their first child. Leonor, the young wife and mother, in her conflict against the environment in which she found herself alone with her second child born after Sebastián's departure, without money to buy sufficient food except for the baby, forced to wear shabby, cast-off clothing of her husband, ". . . un viejo abrigo y unos calcetines de Sebastián" (page 285) kept a smiling face and had not lost the sparkle from her dark blue eyes nor the hope that tomorrow would be better. This was easy in the early hours of the day, walking in the sunshine to the market for her daily shopping, when her body and spirit were fresh, but at the end of a day of teaching classes for poor pay, of hurrying home to prepare the meals, to wash the clothing, to care for the child as she did the household chores, she thought:

Leonor ya no era Leonor, sino una mujer infatigable, con la boca apretada . . . Una mujer corriendo por su día como un buen caballo de carreras, casi con espuma en la boca, para caer al fin, soñolienta, pluma en mano, sobre una cuartilla . . . a Sebastián llena de frases pequeñas . . . incapaces de expresarle aquella nostalgia de él y aquel amor . . . (page 284).

Leonor's concern was not for herself but for her absent husband with whom she carried on a monologue each morning on the way to the market. Her favorite theme during those cold winter days was the photograph, the one she would

surely be sending him soon. The lack of money to accomplish this was Leonor's great concern. To put her own mind at ease and to reassure her husband about this second child, to erase from his memory the little face of their dead baby, he must see a picture of their happy, healthy boy. Leonor wanted to ease the pain of this loss for her husband as this second child had eased it for her.

Ahora la vida iba a tomar un rumbo nuevo. Pronto quizá podrían reunirse los tres. Sebastián conocería al niño, se sentiría orgulloso de él . . . Era necesario, por lo pronto, enviar una fotografía a Sebastián (page 286).

Leonor, being a strong and determined character, solved her conflicts of frustration because of lack of money and of the need to erase the memory of the death of her first child, when she "cumplió su propósito" and had the photograph taken.

Dofia Maria, the widow of the photographer, and her employee Juanón, were not in sympathy with Leonor, the struggling young wife of the soldier. Dofia Maria, in her greed for money, priced a full-length photograph so high that Leonor could not afford it, and she had to sacrifice showing-off the clothing she had so carefully made for the boy. Juanón was disgruntled because she arrived at closing time on a Sunday afternoon and treated her with disinterest and unpleasant grumblings. These two characters stand in contrast to the friendly old woman who sold Leonor

the daily orange for the baby and la trenera, a casual friend who lived on the fourth floor and who stole cigarettes for her, so Leonor suspected, from the train passengers. These two friendships strengthened Leonor in her loneliness. The author does not indicate that Leonor was upset by her treatment at the photo shop. She was too overcome with joy and satisfaction at accomplishing her goal. These minor characters seem to be only another example of Laferet's desire to paint contrasts, the light and the dark.

In the story En la edad del pato the author describes the struggle of adolescent girls with fantasy versus reality in the process of growing up. These girls are frustrated and bored with the restrictions of institutional life and resort to a world of fantasy as a relief from the routine of studying and class work. They react to the restrictions of their youth by precocious behavior, tricks played on their young professors, silly childhood names and games, excessive use of cosmetics, ridiculous ideas about adult life, daydreaming about the world of men, fascination for the soldier in uniform, cruel behavior toward their peers, especially those who were different and did not belong to the group.

The author describes more than the conflict of the adolescent girl with her environment. She describes the

conflict of the adolescent with herself in the behavior of Cristina, a talented and aggressive girl, who is apparently the leader of the group. What started out to be an innocent guessing game, the ability to identify oneself in the caricature animal drawings by Cristina, ended in ridicule and humiliation for the shy and lonely girl who was the outsider and had been shunned by the other girls. The game back-fired and Cristina was forced to face the consequence of her behavior, and that of the group, when she looked at the sad face of the girl known as Lechucita, who had been the object of their laughter. Cristina's sudden enlightenment and remorse prompted her to give the girl her cherished fountain pen. But this is not a satisfactory solution for Cristina for it could not erase the harm she had done, the memory of the hurt expression on Lechucita's face. When Lechucita accepted the gift without a smile, Cristina was left distraught, self-confidence gone, trembling, and, like Lechucita, unable to answer the questions directed to her in class.

Ultima noche is a heart-rendering story of tragedy and suffering brought on by war. It portrays vividly the conflict of the young soldier against the circumstances in which he finds himself, the circumstances of a war-torn nation where duty to country is expected above self. Paul Louvain, a young French soldier in 1940, who had

been executed for desertion the morning the armistice was declared, reveals in a letter to his sweetheart, Claude, the mother of his child, both the struggle against the environmental circumstances of war and the struggle with himself, his terror and fright, his cowardice, his moments of heroism.

In the beginning days of the war Paul felt no love for France to spur him on. He resented being in the army and was in conflict with his surroundings: hunger, long marches, lice, unpleasant company, bitter hatred toward his commander, Lieutenant Durand, hatred so violent he could have killed him. This hatred toward the officer he assuaged by ridiculing him to others and exasperating him in whatever manner he dared. His rebellion toward his physical surroundings, however, finally led him to long for an injury that would remove him from the trenches, and hatred of himself for his cowardice--a duo-conflict with environment and with self. The conflict with his surroundings won over that of desire for courage and self-respect. Paul resorted to a self-inflicted injury. The lieutenant knew this but did not betray him because he knew the other soldiers were aware of the enmity between them and would think he had contrived the accusation. This only intensified Paul's feelings of self-incrimination. The lieutenant proved

to be a better man than he, and this increased his animosity toward this man. Conflicts were mounting for Paul when he met the girl, Claude, while he was recuperating from his wounds at the home of a relative in the village where Claude lived.

Claude had been responsible for helping him resolve his conflicts. She taught him love of France. She was proud of his heroism, of what she thought was his suffering for the sake of his country. Love of her and love for France became one for Paul. He resolved to cleanse himself of his shame when he returned, but circumstances were against him. He was again placed under the command of Lieutenant Durand, and he was faced with the ironic smiles of acquaintances who knew his disgrace. He might have won this conflict in spite of all this, for he was very determined to do so; but then the letter came from Claude about the child she was expecting, his child. Permission for a leave was refused by the lieutenant. Again came the duo-conflict against environment and the struggle within himself. Loyalty to Claude versus loyalty to France tormented him. At last he succumbed again. He lacked the strength to face the conflict heroically and he suffered another self-inflicted wound. The lieutenant had no reason for silence this time. There were witnesses and clear testimony. He was convicted and sentenced to be executed.

In spite of the apparent defeat of Paul, in the end it was a bodily defeat and not a spiritual one. At this point one is not sure if Carmen Laforet is being realistic or sentimental. Paul had apparently resolved his conflicts and declared that he desired death because he believed that with his life he would pay the debt of dishonor. As he watched the dawn of his execution day, he was thinking of his son as the symbol of a new and vigorous youth, of a generation that would rectify the errors of past generations and again cause France to flower. Paul, it appears, died believing his death was just. He asked Claude to believe the same, to put aside hate and sorrow, and live for the future. For Claude, these were bitter and heart-breaking moments. In an effort to comply with Paul's request to look only ahead, she destroyed in the flames his written testimony to her, but she knew his words would live forever in her heart. In the words of the author:

Estas páginas las ha guardado Claude cuidadosamente entre sus joyas. Son ellas las que deben enterar al niño, . . . de la historia de su padre. Lo demás que escribió Paul aquella noche: su miedo helado, sus cobardías y sus heroísmos, sólo Claude en el mundo lo debe conservar en su sangre, porque lo ha sufrido. El testimonio escrito lo devoraron las llamas (page 304).

The reader feels Claude accepted her fate, deeply grieved but without sorrow. For most people this would not be realistic, only for one who felt extreme love of country

above self.

The story of Rosamunda evokes pity for the grotesque creature in her faded dress, worn ballet slippers, wearing a ribbon in her peroxide blond hair, as she poured out her story of frustration and loneliness to a young soldier she met on the train. Felisa, when a young girl, had selected this romantic name of Rosamunda in order to remove herself from the monotony of her dreary life into a dream world where she was loved and admired as a beautiful and talented actress. This behavior indicates a conflict in her youth with both her dreary surroundings and her family, who gave her a name she abhorred. This escape from reality enabled her to endure her unhappy situation. She was jerked from her dream-world by marriage to a practical man who had no sympathy for her delusions of grandeur and expected her to assume the responsibilities of a wife and mother. Through marriage Rosamunda had hoped to avoid facing reality. She expected love to compensate for the fact she was not a beautiful and successful actress. However, Rosamunda's married life and motherhood failed to satisfy her longings for love, for admiration, and for a successful career. She was again in conflict with her environment, the dreary household tasks, and with her family, her husband and children, who had no understanding of her and were not able to give

her the love and sense of importance she needed to satisfy her frustration and resolve these conflicts. Only one son understood her and made life bearable because he listened admiringly to her fantastic stories about her successful past. When he died she fled from the unbearable relationship with her family back to the city of her youth. There she was again in conflict because of lack of esteem and social status. She was ridiculed by her former friends. She was destitute, she had no place to stay, and she suffered from hunger. Finally she was forced to endure the humiliation of charity and to eat in a shelter, sitting among the beggars.

In the end Rosamunda had to accept defeat. She begged her husband to take her back, but not because she had any understanding of her problem, not because she had resolved her conflicts and was ready to accept her role as a wife and mother. She appealed to him only because she was desperate for food and shelter. She was still living in her dream world and felt that she was returning to a tomb. In spite of her painful experiences in the city, Rosamunda was not ready to face the reality of her situation nor to admit the truth about herself. She was still the great actress wearing her ballet slippers and silver ribbon in her hair, she was still anxious to relate a false story of her life rather than admit the truth to

the young soldier or to herself. At the end of the story, she said to him, "Puede usted llamarme Rosamunda . . . no he de enfadarme por eso" (page 309), as she accepted, with a flippancy air, his invitation to breakfast.

In the brief "estampa", Al Colegio, Laforet has expressed vividly the deep emotional conflicts of a young mother as she walked with her four-year-old daughter on a chilly, foggy morning to her first day of school. The story is told in first person as a first-time experience for both mother and child. The mother was so stirred by this important occasion, so filled with anguish at parting with her daughter, so desirous of feeling close to her, that she took off her glove in order to feel the warm, soft, touch of her little girl's hand and to give to the child a feeling of reassurance on this most important day. The author wrote:

Yo me he quitado el guante para sentir la mano de la niña en mi mano y me es infinitamente tierno este contacto, tan agradable, tan amical, que la estrecho un poquito emocionada. . . . Sé perfectamente la importancia de este apretón, sabe que yo estoy con ella y que somos más amigas hoy que otro día cualquiera (page 310).

The mother sensed the anxiety of her child through the touch of her hand and seemed to feel satisfaction from the need that the child had for her and her own ability to meet this need. The mother thought:

Es ella ahora la que inicia una caricia tímida con su manita dentro de la mía; y por primera vez me doy

cuenta de que su mano de cuatro años es igual a mi mano grande: tan decidida, tan poco suave, tan nerviosa como la mía. Sé por este contacto de su mano que le late el corazón al saber que empieza su vida de trabajo en la tierra . . . (page 312).

The conflict on the part of the mother is one with self, with a desire to keep the child with her against one of desire to let her go. She had pride in the child's readiness to go out into the world for which she had prepared her, yet she felt the pain of parting. She wanted to help this little girl and yet, for a moment, she felt her mere presence belied her confidence in the child's ability to stand on her own. As she watched the child cross the school yard alone she thought:

Me parece mal quedarme allí; me da vergüenza acompañar a la niña hasta última hora, como si ella no supiera ya valerse por sí misma en este mundo nuevo, al que yo he traído . . . Y tampoco la beso, porque sé que ella en este momento no quiere (page 312).

The mother experienced anguish and doubt, not in the child's ability, but in herself, doubt as to whether she had prepared the child well. She thought of all the things she should have told her, now that she was older, now that she was going to school and would not be at home under her guidance. The author expressed the mother's thoughts:

Sola, desde la puerta, la veo marchar, sin volver la cabeza ni por un momento. Se me ocurren cosas para ella, un montón de cosas que tengo que decirle, . . . ahora que ya no la tengo en casa, a mi disposición a todas horas . . . (page 312).

The mother also experienced feelings of remorse because she had not spent more time with her child, because she had not enjoyed more fully the moments she had had with her. She thought about the long walks they were going to take when she had planned to teach her about the things of nature as she believed a good parent should, walks that did not materialize because time was short and she was always too exhausted after she had dressed the child with care for the occasion and answered all the "porqués". Instead of the long walk through the park, they used to find a taxi and go to the grandmother's home, a place of peace where she could drop into a chair and rest while the grandparents answered all the questions.

The mother's anxiety and remorse concerning her inadequacy as a parent and the pain of separation from her child were assuaged by her own pleasant memories of the days she had spent in that same school, ". . . sé que el colegio que le he buscado le gustará, porque me gusta a mí . . ." and by the anticipation of companionship with her daughter as they would travel together across the city to the school each day, ". . . le parecerá bien ir a buscarlo cada día, conmigo, por las calles de la ciudad . . ." (page 312).

The mother's final consolation was in the thought that although school meant a physical separation from her

child, spiritually and intellectually it would bring them together. The mother reminisced:

Se me ocurre pensar que cada día lo que aprenda en esta casa blanca, lo que la vaya separando de mí--trabajo, amigos, ilusiones nuevas--, la irá acercando de tal modo a mi alma, que al fin no sabré dónde termina mi espíritu ni dónde empieza el suyo (page 312).

This was an optimistic conclusion, typical of Carmen Laforet and a realistic one, provided the mother is well-adjusted and able to allow her child to grow up, painful as it may be to her to let the child go. The reader feels that the mother in this story is the author herself because the story is told so vividly it must have been experienced, and that the closing is a message to all mothers of the joys they may continue to share with their children.

Through Julián, the protagonist of El regreso, the author expresses the torment, anxiety, and fears that well up in a man who is returning home to his family cured, after treatment in a mental hospital. For two years Julián had found peace within those walls, and he had no desire to leave them. Julián's conflict at this point of return was not against his family but within himself. He was afraid to assume again the responsibilities of providing for his family. Added to this he had guilt feelings because he had been living a pleasant and

protected life with adequate food and shelter while his family had lived on charity. As he approached the city and saw the factory chimneys and workmen's houses, Julián's guilt increased because he had preferred to spend a happy Christmas-eve at the institution in preference to going home to be with his family. The author described his feelings:

Julián empezó a tener remordimientos de haber disfrutado, tanto la noche anterior. . . . Julián no tenía derecho a tan caliente y cómoda Nochebuena, porque hacía bastantes años que en su casa esas fiestas carecían de significado (page 317).

Julián's illness was the result of a conflict with poverty and hunger, with economic conditions that resulted in his loss of employment as a chauffeur because of the shortage of gasoline. His concern for his family led him to go without food in order that the children and his wife, who was pregnant, might eat. After months of no work and no food, he became violent one day and was on the point of killing his wife, Herminia, when he was taken away by the authorities.

In the institution Julián's conflicts had been resolved with the care and protection he received and he longed to remain there. It had become a refuge and salvation for him. The Mother Superior, Sor María de la Asunción, was a mother figure to him: "Julián la quería mucho. . . . se había llevado una alegría al verla"

(page 315). There was only one unpleasant experience there, contact with gor Rosa whom he did not like. It came as a great shock to him to realize that she looked like his wife, Herminia, whom he loved very much. This dislike he could never understand, "En la vida hay cosas incomprensibles" (page 316). Possibly it was the reaction to guilt feelings concerning his attack on his wife.

The author paints a vivid picture of Julián's feelings of inadequacy and loss of confidence upon his return home. He suddenly realized that he had been a coward, "De pronto se daba cuenta de lo cobarde . . ." (page 318), but his self-esteem was lessened even more when he found that his family had been better off without him. A charitable organization had helped them and had found a job for his wife. Would he rob them of this security and force hunger on them again? Julián realized, as he looked at his family, that they expected him to provide for them now and "De golpe le caían otra vez sobre los hombros las responsabilidades, angustias. . . . A hacerla pasar hambre otra vez, seguramente, a . . ." (page 319). The story ends on a note of uncertainty. Julián's conflict with his feelings of inadequacy and his fear of his situation, the difficulty he is going to face in re-establishing himself in his home and on a job are unsolved. His family cannot understand his sad face,

they do not know that beyond the pile of Christmas gifts Julián sees, with all its cruelty, life as always.

Carmen Laforet's treatment of the emotional conflicts of Pedro in the story Un matrimonio appears to be more idealistic than realistic. Pedro was a wealthy young playboy, "alto y fuerte y de carácter alegre," who had attended the university only so that he might enjoy the agreeable life of Madrid. His father was proud of his son and pampered him with money for whatever he desired. Thus Pedro had lived a gay, carefree life with no conflicts with his family or his environment. He had never faced the consequences of his acts, ". . . jamás se había privado de nada que le apeteciese en el momento. . . . jamás había pensado en las consecuencias de sus actos" (page 325). On several occasions his father had warned him, "Puede que cuando cambies sea tarde, muchacho . . . Pero no era tarde, la verdad. Pedro tenía solamente veintitrés años" (page 325). It was at this point that Pedro came into sudden conflict with his environment, the customs of his social class, with his family, and with the people of his community.

Pedro was dismissed from school for failure to study. He had fallen in love with a chorus girl whom neither the community nor his family would accept and in defending her against them he suddenly realized that,

contrary to his previous intentions, he desired to marry this girl who was pregnant with his child and refused to destroy a life in order to avoid shame, disgrace, and responsibility. Pedro could not believe his doting father would turn against him, and he married Gloria. He felt it was the idle gossip of their acquaintances that poisoned his father's mind, and he hated them for this life of absolute deprivation that had been forced upon him. To Gloria he would say, "Estamos aprendiendo muchas cosas" (page 323), which made her smile, for she had never known anything but hardship.

It infuriated Pedro that his father refused to help them. Bitter words were exchanged, but fury turned into grief and hate when he received only a curt telegram from his father in reply to a message announcing the birth of his son. Pedro realized "No recordaba haber llorado desde su infancia; habfa sido un muchacho duro, pero ahora sintió que se le humedecían los ojos" (pages 325-326). It was inconceivable to think of his father's face as he destroyed Pedro's letters and wrote the words cutting Pedro out of his life forever, "No tenemos hijos ni nietos. Inútiles cartas ni peticiones. Arréglate" (page 326). Pedro felt he already had rearranged his life and accepted his responsibility when he went to work as a bricklayer, when he sold his coat for food for the family.

There is a fairy-story ending. As Pedro walked through the streets on a cold, clear night, marvelling at the beauty of the starry heavens and the flickering lights of the city, he realized he was deliriously happy. All of his feelings of hatred and bitterness were gone, and he felt like praying. His overwhelming love for his wife Gloria, his pride in his little son, his sudden sense of responsibility for them had been his salvation. He felt only pity for his father, who refused to share their family happiness. He felt no regrets nor blame toward Gloria, who was responsible for his disinheritance, but gratitude. He was not able to sleep that night, not because of worry or anguish, but for pride and joy in his new sense of well-being. He had become a man.

In the story El aguinaldo, Carmen Laforet introduces the religious theme. Isabel, the protagonist, was not in conflict with any religious beliefs, for she lacked them. She was in conflict with her way of life, with her environment, and with herself. She felt that her life was over; and, when she looked back, she had only empty memories. As Isabel considered her life, she thought:

"Tengo años, y nada más que años . . . La vida me ha dado todo lo que tenía que darme ya, y cuando miro hacia atrás la encuentro un poco vacía . . . Nada de lo que he hecho hasta ahora me convence . . . Nada me

ha llenado del todo. Los enamoramientos se pasan.
Los hijos crecen y la decepcionan a una . . ."
(pages 336-337).

Isabel was reacting to these attacks of melancholy by physical illness. She felt the necessity of seeing a doctor but hesitated for lack of plausible symptoms. All of these feelings and physical reactions as described by Carmen Laforet are common among women like Isabel, who was an attractive and youthful grandmother, bored with no responsibilities and no purpose in her life, frustrated and lonely.

Her family was no consolation to her. Margarita, her daughter, had done well at the university and showed promise as a poetess, but she had married a doctor, Julio Lopes-Gay, whom Isabel considered uncultured and dull, and had gone to live in a small community. She had written no poetry since. Isabel was disappointed that Margarita was content with raising her family and that she was always concerned about making a good impression, always worrying about what people might think about her, "Margarita, a quien ella habia educado para ser libre e independiente como el aire" (page 337).

Isabel, while spending the Christmas holidays with her daughter and family, was suddenly jolted out of her melancholy state and tendency to enjoy self-pity. In order to keep peace in the household of the doctor, she

visited the local hospital to deliver Christmas gifts because her daughter felt unable to endure this annual task and the doctor refused to send a servant. There, when she delivered the doctor's Christmas gift to Manuela Ruiz she met the helpless invalid who had spent forty years in a wheel chair in the hospital. The woman could not read and could scarcely speak but her acceptance of suffering, her faith in God's will, was a revelation to the self-centered Isabel. The author wrote:

Isabel crefa, un rato antes, que la vida no tenfa nada que enseñarle ya; y ahora estaba aprendiendo . . . Siempre había tenido un gran interés por aprender . . . (page 342).

Isabel felt humility and shame when she discovered what esteem the hospital staff had for her crude but kind son-in-law, the doctor. She was moved to learn he spent hours at Manuela's side reading to her and gaining strength and patience through her faith and courage. She realized he did this not to seek approval but because of the mutual benefit to himself and his patient. Isabel's conception of this man changed, "esa idea la reconciliaba con Julio, le hacia ver en él algo muy distinto . . ." (page 343). This experience changed entirely Isabel's outlook on life and her attitude toward her family. When the doctor inquired about her visit she replied: "Me ha gustado mucho" (page 343). Margarita thought the remark

insincere until she saw her mother's radiant face. She had gone reluctantly to take a Christmas gift, and, in the words of her daughter, she had returned with a face as serene as if she had found "la piedra filosofal". Isabel spoke jovially, lightly, but seriously when she said she had to think now about this treasure she had found in order not to lose it. The others were not listening, but she knew the doctor was doing so and was aware of what she meant.

Through the wisdom of the suffering and unfortunate Manuela, who believed that because she was able to accept her suffering, God was ready to listen as she prayed for others, Isabel was able to resolve her conflicts with the life she had found unbearable, to enjoy her family and relatives that had gathered for the holidays. She was no longer filled with melancholy but a glow of happiness. She did not know what had happened, she would have to talk with Julio, with her daughter Margarita, with them all, perhaps with Manuela again or "Quizá sólo un poco con Dios, como la pobre Manuela había hecho tantos años para aprender a vivir su vida" (page 344). Isabel's enlightenment following her experience at the hospital seems plausible for an intelligent and sensitive woman such as she seemed to be. One feels that the doctor was aware of his mother-in-law's problems and, due to his own

experience, was able to understand this change in her. Since interest in others tends to make anyone forget himself, this is a realistic and satisfactory conclusion.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Although Carmen Laforet claims that her novels are not autobiographical, it seems evident that her life affected her choice of characters and the problems they faced. Both Andrea in Nada and Marta in La isla y los demonios lived with relatives because of broken homes. This was also true of the author. The reader feels that the emotional conflicts experienced by these two adolescent girls were those the author also had faced. The anguish expressed by the mothers for their small children in some of the short stories and novels is possibly the concern that the author felt at times as the mother of small children. The setting of the novel La isla y los demonios is on the Gran Canaria, the island where the author grew up and from which she left to pursue her education. This situation is repeated in Nada. Because of the vivid manner in which the author described the condition and results of poverty throughout her works, it seems she is presenting some of the social problems she has witnessed in post-war Spain. Her works, however, do not deal at length with war or social problems.

The author's chief interest is in her characters and their inter-personal relationships. The same type of

conflicts and people appear throughout her writings. Marital discord and sibling rivalry are predominate themes and affect inter-personal relationship and home environmen adversely. The matter of the young girl enamored with an older lover or vice versa also appears repeatedly, and the resultant clash with social mores is considered. The author is particularly concerned with the conflict of the person against himself and his struggle to secure his identity and maintain his dignity. She expresses vividly the anguish of loneliness, fear, envy, the longing for love and affection, bitter frustrations, struggle with conscience, feelings of inferiority, lack of self-esteem, which results in self-incrimination and sense of inferiority.

Carmen Laforet's characters are mostly young people, both married and single, and two novels are devoted to the anxieties of the adolescent in a post-war world. Types of characters repeat themselves. There are the educated and the intelligent, the optimistic and the desolate, the vagabonds, the unsuccessful artists, the poor aristocrats, faithful servants, mysterious and sometimes sinister persons, insecure and dominating men, sensitive, weak, and often pathetic and wanton women opposed to the severe and rigid type. There are constant contrasts of light and dark.

The author, in dealing with the inter-personal and environmental conflicts throughout her works has for the most part treated them realistically, even though some of the situations seem contrived. Her stories move through character development and description of the emotional experiences of these characters. They contain very little action. Her descriptions of emotional conflicts are vivid and convincing with the result that the reader endures the pain of these experiences. The characters are for the most part neurotic and tormented individuals driven by forces beyond their control.

The outstanding characteristic of the works of Carmen Laforet is the fact that her stories, in spite of the pessimism and disillusionment they contain, end to the satisfaction of the reader and with a strong feeling of optimism for the future destiny of the protagonist. This is in sharp contrast to most writers of present-day Spain and Latin America and makes the reading of Carmen Laforet's writing a fascinating and delightful experience.

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