ELEMENTS OF TRAGEDY IN THE WORKS OF

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ELEMENTS OF TROMBIDISMO IN THE WORKS OF
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From the appearance of the first Spanish pastoral, picaresque, and chivalric romances of the Golden Age to the present day writings of Carmen Lafont and Camilo José Cela, the novel has been cultivated intensely by peninsular authors of nearly every generation. The appearance of Fernán Caballero's *La Gaviota* in 1849, may be said, however, to mark the beginning of a period of novelistic development which has not yet been seriously interrupted.

From 1849 until 1882, the majority of Spanish novelists were easily classifiable into two factions according to their literary and political ideologies. Aware of their country's decline in relative economic prosperity and political prestige, one group, the traditionalists, favored a return to the customs and institutions of the glorious national past as a means of restoring Spain to her former position of international pre-eminence. The other group, the liberals, looked to the Europeanization of Spanish life as the only possible solution for the same problem. The latter advocated
Spanish imitation or adoption of the customs and the institutions which they felt had enabled rival nations to surpass their own in the last 250 years.

Writers of the period in question differed considerably more thematically than stylistically. For example, there is a certain similarity in the realistic styles of Galdós and Pereda, but in regard to themes and plots, two novelists could hardly differ more. Among the novelists of this period, Valera, Alarcón, and Pereda were united behind a conservative traditionalism while Pardo Bazán, Valdés, Galdós, and Ibáñez made common cause as liberals.¹

The Spanish Realistic novel, which flourished in the latter half of the nineteenth century, was enhanced and developed further by the succeeding Generation of '98. The more important novelists of the Generation of '98 differed from those of the previous fifty years in that they were united behind a single philosophy or theme. Since Spanish prosperity, prestige, and power had reached their lowest ebb in history following the devastating Spanish-American War (1898), the literature of this era was in a sense largely an attempt to solve all of Spain's social, economic, and religious problems. In contrast to earlier Realists, who could be defined by theme, the

¹Willis H. Jones, "Recent Novels of Spain," *Hispania*, XL (September, 1927), 306.
Generation of '98 had to be identified by style or technique.

The Generation of '98 and all other literary and cultural activity in Spain came to a sudden halt with the advent of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). On July 17, 1936, rebel regiments in Spanish Morocco began a three-year military conflict that filled one of the bloodiest chapters in Spanish history. A brief summary of major events of the Spanish Civil War will be profitable since the subject of this thesis deals with an aspect of Spanish literature of the immediate postwar period.

For several years prior to the initial revolutionary outbreak, there had grown in Spain a keen, and at times, violent rivalry between the liberal and conservative factions. The latter were supported by the wealthy landowners, many of the high-ranking military leaders, the monarchists, and the Church. The liberal coalition included Communists, Socialists, Republicans, and most of the National and local trade unions. Each side alternately won political victories for some time, while the division between them steadily widened.

In 1931, the victorious Republican candidates exacerbated the hatred of the conservatives by confiscating lands of both the wealthy landowners and the Church, who were left virtually defenseless in the face
of such action. New elections were called in 1933, and a
split among the liberals gave the conservatives the upper
hand. Their victory led to chaos throughout the country;
however, by military force, the government was able to
remain in control.

During the next three years, the division between the
two groups grew even wider, and the elections of 1936
found the liberals united again behind a new organization
called the Popular Front. With this unity the liberals
regained power and control of the Spanish government.

One of the liberal government's prime oversights
seems to have been that of ignoring disloyal military
officials. The latter were not arrested, but instead,
sent to remote garrisons in the Canary Islands, Spanish
Morocco, and the Balearic Islands. One such general was
Francisco Franco Bahamonde, sent to the Canary Islands,
who on July 17, 1936, flew to Morocco to head a revolt.
Within forty-eight hours the people of the Spanish main-
land were involved in a violent and bloody civil war.

Both the conservatives and the liberals aligned
themselves with rival foreign powers. The conservatives
accepted Fascist assistance from Germany and Italy, while
the liberals obtained the support of France and Russia.
The struggle continued for nearly three years, and
innumerable atrocities were committed by both sides.
At last, in the Spring of 1939, the Fascist-armed rebels were victorious, and General Franco emerged as the head of a new Spanish government.

The instability and insecurity of General Franco's government led immediately to tight restrictions of political freedom throughout the country. One of Franco's first acts as military dictator of Spain was to impose a complete censorship of literature. Literary expression of ideas considered dangerous to the new government was forbidden. Willis K. Jones remarks as follows on the extent of governmental control immediately following the Civil War:

Bookstores in the capital were ordered closed for a week so that all subversive titles might be cleared from the shelves. Thousands of these confiscated volumes were later shipped to America in exchange for needed dollars. Among the books banned as too dangerous for the minds of Franco's followers were most of Galdós's, and all but one of Baroja's. One English visitor to Spain reported that his personal copy of the seventeenth-century Life of Santa Teresa was seized at the frontier, suspected because it antedated the birth of the Republic. In May 1938 the patio of the University of Madrid was the scene of a general book burning.2

Most Spanish intellectuals who had not died or been killed during the war were forced to take refuge in Mexico, Argentina, or other Latin American countries. All literary works produced by these exiled writers were,

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2 Willis K. Jones, "Recent Novels of Spain," *Hispania*, XL (September, 1937), 303.
of course, banned by the Franco government. Writers who desired to have works published were forced to either conform to the existing literary restrictions or flee Spain. Never in history had there been stricter governmental control over literary activity in Spain.

Such intellectual and artistic losses aroused broad curiosity and anxiety among literary critics and the reading public concerning the course to be taken by post-war Spanish literature. Serious doubts were entertained as to whether such strict governmental control would permit the production of truly valuable works. Moreover, no one could guess what the Spanish novel of the future would be like, because prewar Spanish novels had been so varied and multiform.

In 1939, the Spanish people remained divided ideologically into two general factions. This division of thought was partially the result of an overlapping and a continuation of the ideas and beliefs that existed prior to the Spanish Civil War. However, unlike international war, which tends to tighten and strengthen the internal conditions and affairs of participating countries, civil war separates peoples into distinct factions for long periods of time after the fighting has ceased. The Spanish people had been wounded and offended too much during their Civil War to accept a quick unification of both faith and effort.
The dictatorial regime of General Franco, which followed the Civil War, imposed a cultural atmosphere that left the writer a sharply reduced margin of freedom of expression. Those who initiated the moral and material reconstruction of the nation now sought, with the hope of nurturing their own ideas, to close the boundaries tightly to outside cultural influences. Not only Spanish, but foreign works deemed dangerous by the state and by the Church were banned.  

Some Spaniards speculated that postwar literature would follow the path of tradition. Since Spain’s cultural detachment from the rest of Europe and from America gave opportunity for intense research into prewar literary works of the nation, they hoped, in fact, that a serious loss of touch with tradition would be remedied. However, since there had been such a complete break in literary activity and in the continuity of many old ways of life as a result of the Civil War, another contingent believed that it would be no less than foolish to assume that postwar literature could be based on tradition or even a type of literary evolution. They supported the idea that postwar literature would, and should, be completely divorced from previous writing. To them there was hope of the birth of a new, uncorrupted phase in Spanish literary history.

3 Ibid., p. 304.
In reality the development of the modern Spanish novel has witnessed a combination, or blend, of both of these philosophies. Even though there had been a definite literary break during the Civil War, traditionalism could not be disregarded, discarded, or overlooked. Spanish novels have contained certain traditional elements ever since the picaresque and pastoral works of the Golden Age. The postwar novel was eventually to combine such traditionalism with important new elements.

As time passed and the Franco regime began to feel more secure of its position and strength, literary restrictions and censorship began to be lifted. New short stories, poems, plays, and novels slowly made their appearance again on the shelves of Spanish bookstores. Since the Civil War had provided ample subjects for observation and there had been abundant opportunity for reflection about the difficult war years, and since ideological content was still sharply restricted, novelists began to write about people, rather than causes.4

The first definite response to the great literary anticipation came with the publication in 1942 of Le familia de Pascual Duarte by Camilo José Cela. Mariano García states that this was "the work which really opened

4Willis K. Jones, "Recent Novels of Spain," Hispania, XL (September, 1957), 304.
the post-war period of Spanish fiction." Pascual Duarte, its protagonist, is a hapless individual who tells his story from a prison cell. The narrative is markedly picareseque in both style and content. Willis K. Jones says of it:

His [Cela's] desire for reader appeal through shock determined the plot. Pascual supposedly wrote his memoirs to show that man's actions are determined by Fate. His little brother Mario was chewed by pigs and drowned in a cask of oil. At the funeral, Pascual seduced a girl. Later he married her, but when the jolting of the coach on their honeymoon caused a miscarriage, he killed the horse. Their next child died. A third child, by another man, brought death to the wife and her seducer. Pascual's mother's death was the result of his violence. Finally he also dies, garroted for cowardice during the Civil War.6

The publication of La familia de Pascual Duarte left the Spanish reading public amazed and even startled. Julian Palley says of the effect of the work upon its readers:

Cela's book has its origin in the Picaresque novel, but it contains no humor; anguish and the absurd dogs the feet of its anti-hero. Its implacable violence stuns the reader into asking himself if such unrelieved misery could exist anywhere.7

In 1944 the newly initiated Eugenio Nadal Prize was awarded to another new writer, the twenty-two year old


6Willis K. Jones, "Recent Novels of Spain," Hispania, XL (September, 1957), 308.

Carmen Laforet, for her first novel, *Nada*. Torrente Ballester comments briefly upon the significance of its appearance: "Si Pascual Duarte representa el primer hito importante de la novela española de postguerra, *Nada* es, sin disputa, el segundo, aunque sólo en el orden cronológico, pues su orientación estética es distinta, opuesta."\(^8\) Juan Luis Alborg has this to say regarding the significance of both of these important novels and the superior quality of *Nada*:

*Nada*—la novela bien pronto popularísima de aquel primer «*Nada*»—y *La familia de Pascual Duarte*, de Cela, que le había precedido en el ruedo literario, fueron los libros que levantaron el nuevo teléculo de nuestra novela interrumpida, y conquistaron el interés del público español con un runrún de curiosidad que en el ambiente de nuestras letras casi resultaba sensacional.\(^9\)

La calidad del libro [*Nada*] se prestaba al milagro en medida muy superior al *Pascual Duarte*. Su tono medio y la atinada proporción de elementos novedosos de efecto seguro, la hacían apta para ese público amplísimo que no exige a la novela sino interés. En cuanto a los factores circunstanciales aludidos es preciso reconocer que aquel premio convocado por «*Destino*» se acortó a rodear de una nerviosa expectación que entre nosotros no tenía precedentes, y el hecho de que fuera galardonada una muchacha cuyo rostro—entonces animado y simpático—se reprodujo hasta el cansancio, acrecentó su popularidad. La crítica más exigente, que entonces no existía

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Most critics agree that La familia de Pascual Duarte and Nada, especially the latter, mark not merely a postwar recovery, but a genuine renaissance in Spanish literature. Willis K. Jones, for example, declares:

The highest point of the Spanish novel, in my estimation, was the last part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. But it is quite possible that Spain is moving into a new Golden Age of the novel. At least it is a Renaissance, full of literary activity well worth the attention of students.

A great deal of analysis and research has recently been done concerning the different literary tendencies that began to appear in Spain during the decade following the Civil War, and a number of new terms have come into use. Mariano García explains:

Dentro del rumbo a tomar por la novela española de hoy, existe un camino lo suficientemente recorrido y abandonado ya, como para percibir con nitidez su sesgo y su alcance. Los vocablos empleados para definir esa tendencia de la novela son bastente numerosos. Posiblemente, cada uno de los sugeridos encierran un cierto matiz diferencial. De una forma o de otra sean acertados o no, todo lector español sabe en la actualidad lo que suele haber tras los términos "neorealismo", "naturalismo", "picarismo", "tremendismo", etc. ...

10 Ibid., pp. 126-127.
11 Willis K. Jones, "Recent Novels of Spain," Hispánia, XL (September, 1957), 311.
12 Mariano García, "La novela española de 1939 a 1953," Cuadernos hispánicamericanos (July, 1955), p. 82.
Critics today most frequently use *tremendismo* as the name for perhaps the most important tendency in the postwar Spanish novel. No one knows definitely where or when the term originated. One opinion is that it was derived from the excessive use of the word *tremendo* by the poet Zubisurru, while others attribute its origin to the excessive use of the same word by the novelist Camilo José Cela in his earlier writings.\(^\text{13}\)

Since there is a semi-official ban on existentialism in Spain, almost all literary critics agree that *tremendismo* is only a disguised form of existentialism. A type of emphatic realism that stresses the somber and grim sides of life, it also accentuates cruelty and violence, boredom and anguish. Almost all of the negative aspects of life—death, suffering, nausea, perversion—are essential to its narratives. Positive values are neglected almost entirely. Jerónimo Mallo says of it:

> Se trata de relatos novelescos relativos a personas, hechos y situaciones verdaderamente terribles, de los que unas veces por la magnitud y otras por la acumulación de motivos de horror se recibe al leerlos una impresión 'tremende'. Ahora bien, hechos y situaciones que producen espanto las hemos encontrado en varios géneros literarios: en la tragedia, en el drama romántico, en la novela naturalista, por ejemplo, que son muy conocidos. Pero las modernas creaciones del "tremendismo" español presentan evidentemente caracteres distintos. Lo que sucede en las novelas contemporáneas y se califica de

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\(^{13}\) Willis K. Jones, "Recent Novels of Spain," *Hispania*, XL (September, 1957), 304.
"tremendismo" corresponde indudablemente a una nueva tipología literaria, a una sensibilidad no conocido anteriormente. Sin embargo, su caracterización no me parece fácil, y este breve ensayo no pasa de ser una primera tentativa exploratoria, que habría de tener continuación en un estudio más detenido y extenso.\footnote{14}

Mariano García also contends that in regard to content, the main traits of *tremendismo* are "amateurishness, plotlessness, and a morbid interest in the gloomier, sordid side of life."\footnote{15} Whatever the definition, it may be said that *tremendismo* has played an important part in postwar Spanish fiction and that the word itself has become as common in the twentieth century as *realismo* and *naturalismo* were in the nineteenth.

The postwar Spanish novel, then, became a literary work in which the prevailing mood was one of hopelessness in the face of conditions neither invited nor understood. It may be assumed that its cultivators display a marked concern for experimentation.

Among present-day Spanish novelists, Carmen Laforet has emerged as perhaps the most exemplary; and since four major works have by now established her reputation, it seems time for an evaluation of her writing and an appraisal of her importance in her country's literary...
history. The purpose of this thesis is to review and to analyze the part that tremendismo has played in the fiction of Carmen Laforet. To this end, each of her published volumes will be studied individually so that her relationship to tremendismo may be clearly seen in each of its various stages.

Carmen Laforet was born September 6, 1921, in Barcelona, Spain. Her father was an architect of Basque and French lineage and her mother a woman of humble parentage from Toledo. At a very early age, she moved with her family to Las Palmas, in the Canary Islands, and her elementary education was there completed, away from the turmoil and tragedy of the Spanish Civil War. Her tranquil days in Las Palmas were shared by her brothers, Eduardo and Juan, to whom she was greatly attached. However, at the age of thirteen her peaceful life in the Islands was disrupted by the death of her mother and her father's remarriage.

Shortly after the close of the Civil War in 1939, Carmen Laforet returned to postwar Spain, and at the age of eighteen began the study of law at the University of Barcelona. Three years later she moved to Madrid and continued her studies at the Universidad Central de Madrid. She did not, however, carry them on to graduation.
In 1944 with a summer vacation ahead of her and having previously published only a Mother's Day article in a magazine, she began work on a full-length novel. Willis K. Jones comments as follows on her almost spontaneous attraction to writing and explains the source of the title of her now-famous first literary effort:

Miss Laforet's visualization was so complete that Chapter I appeared in print exactly as she first penned it in her copy book. She really had no time for revision, because the closing date for the newly announced Nada competition was close. She bundled up the loose pages, and scribbled a title Nada, because she considered it a mere "nothing." 16

To her imaginable surprise and delight, her novel was selected over twenty-six other entries to receive the prize. In 1948 it went on to win another significant honor, the Mastenrath Prize offered by the Royal Spanish Academy. It may thus be said that Carmen Laforet became successful and famous almost overnight. Juan Luis Alborg speaks as follows of her sudden attainment of glory:

Rocosos escritores han podido irrumpir al campo de la literatura con más favorables auspicios que Carmen Laforet, metódicamente revelada por el <Premio Nada>—en la primera ocasión en que se concedía— de 1944. La novedad y cuantía, entonces imitada, del premio y la sorpresa de que se tratase de una mujer—de una muchacha casi,— cuando apenas si en nuestras letras recordábamos de damas que escribieron (muy lejos aún de la azarosa proliferación femenina de los años posteriores), se sumaba al general deseo de asistir al nacimiento de escritores españoles, después de aquel paréntesis de natural

16 Willis K. Jones, "Recent Novela of Spain," Hispania, XL (September, 1957), 305.
silencio que había sucedido a la tajante peripecia de nuestra guerra. 17

Her next novel was eagerly awaited; however, for several years following the appearance of Hada, she published no writings and seemed to have abandoned the field of letters entirely. Her marriage during this period to Samuel G. Cerezales, a journalist and literary critic, and the birth of their first three children obviously account for this interruption of her novelistic career.

In 1950 and 1951 a number of short stories and articles by Carmen Iñiguez were published in various magazines and periodicals, and in 1952 she submitted for publication her second long novel, La isla y los demonios. The following possible explanation of her return to writing has been suggested: "... the filming of Hada, for which she was a consultant, rekindled her interest in writing, and in 1952 she published a second novel, springing from her memories of Los Palmas and called La isla y los demonios." 18

Again there was an interlude between her major works that was filled with a collection of short stories and

18Willis K. Jones, "Recent Novels of Spain," Hispanic, XL (September, 1957), 306.

Even though Carmen Laforet's later novels are generally considered inferior to *Mada*, they have been eagerly received by the reading public and their author enjoys a reputation as one of the best novelists writing in Spain today. Successfully combining a literary career with responsibilities as a wife and mother, she lives today with her husband and five children in Madrid, where she continues to write. The future may well hold in store for her even greater literary renown than she has attained up to the present.
CHAPTER II

HADA

It has already been shown that upon its appearance in 1944, Carmen Leforet’s HADA caused a sensation in Spanish literary circles. The initial enthusiasm with which it was hailed by critics has, moreover, endured through the years since its publication. The noted authority Federico Sainz de Robles states in this regard: "El éxito de HADA fue en verdad sensacional. Y la crítica, con excepciones contadas, la ha consagrado como una de las mejores novelas aparecidas después de 1939, habiendo sido traducida a varios idiomas."¹

It has also been previously shown that a prominent aspect of the contemporary Spanish novel is its heavy emphasis on man’s despair and the meaninglessness of life. HADA is no exception to that rule, even though there are tinges of felicity and contentment found in the role of the heroine and in some of the more placid events of the story. Like most present day Spanish novelists, Carmen Leforet is less interested in the plot of her narrative

¹Federico Sainz de Robles, La novela española en el siglo XX (Madrid, 1957), p. 263.
than in the characterizations and in the portrayal of the moral and intellectual climates of postwar Spain.2

The plot of Nada is basically simple. Carmen Laforet is intent first of all upon shaping into narrative form the turbulent experiences of an impressionable young girl who is confronted with the distorted lives of a very unusual group of people. The story consists of a series of episodes from the life of Andrea, a prim, young eighteen-year-old student, who has come to Barcelona in order to live with her grandmother while attending the University. The absorbing actions and events center around her struggle to escape the nightmarish existence which she encounters in the house on Aribau Street. Luis Alborg says of the conditions in which the heroine finds herself:

La familia es un curioso conglomerado de personajes descenteados, y a su contacto, Andrea, la protagonista, va a sufrir las primeras experiencias desagradables de su vida y el despertar temeroso de su personalidad. Un clima de pasión, de espectante dramatismo, alfestado con efectismos y habilidades, pero bien conseguido, envuelve todo el relato, y dentro de ese mundo de seres exaltados y violentos, mezquinos y vulgares en el fondo, van a estallarse—como un insecto en un farol—los ardores juveniles de Andrea y a florecer la primera cosecha de sus desencantos.3

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The apartment in which the family dwells becomes the focal point upon which the reader's attention is fixed. It should be added that there is an unmistakable compactness to the novel, the action of which takes place during a period of almost exactly one year.

Even though many of the basic events of the story coincide with Carmen Laforet's own life, she denies that Nada is autobiographical:

No es—como ninguna de mis novelas—autobiográfica, aunque el relato de una chica estudiante—como yo fui en Barcelona—es incluso la circunstancia de haberla colocado viviendo en una calle de esta ciudad donde yo misma he vivido haya planteado esta cuestión, más de una vez.  

The narrative of Nada begins two years after the close of the Spanish Civil War. The country has been weakened by the three-year conflict, and an unhealthy society has been left. The city that Andrea visits, Barcelona, is still filled with the frustration, anxiety, and despair of postwar life, and the people remain bitterly preoccupied with unpleasant memories of the war years. There are few ruins or devastated properties, but the grim struggle of society hangs heavily in the atmosphere and forms the background for the events of the novel. The selection of Barcelona as the setting is of relatively little significance since almost any

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4 Carmen Laforet, Mis páginas mayores (Madrid, 1956), p. 13.
large Spanish city with a university might have served equally as well. The psychological make-up of the various individuals who live in the house on Aribau Street needs to be discussed since the prime interest of this tremendista novel, like that of all others, stems from events of their sordid and disturbed lives. The central figures, with their bickering and constant turning to the dark past when, at least, they had a sense of mattering, are convincingly delineated by Carmen Laforet. Her forceful style is always under control, and her ability to develop and sustain a characterization is well demonstrated. She deftly catalogues the psychological terrors and the physical disturbances in the lives of these trapped men and women, whose futility is symbolized by the title of the novel.

In Barcelona Andres finds, instead of the carefree and stimulating life she had expected, an existence of hopeless entanglement with the various members of her family. In true tremendista form the characters she encounters continually suffer in an atmosphere of boredom, anguish, and hopelessness. Neurotic and warped individuals at odds with themselves and their families, they do not know what they want from life and succeed only in

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hurting each other. Carmen Laforet's deep understanding of characters of this type enhances her superb characterization of the contrasting principal personage. Jerónimo Nadal describes in this way the tremendous hopelessness of Andrea's relatives:

El "tremendismo" de cada consiste en el sufrimiento constante, dierio, de las seis personas que com parten en dura convivencia el piso de la calle de Arribau, arrestando como pesada cadena el dramatismo de unas vidas en las que no hay esperanza alguna de mejoramiento y en las que tampoco se disfruta la trágica de pasajeras alegrías. Destilan las páginas de la novela—aunque sólo la abuela y la nieta inspiran simpatía al lector—la angustia terrible del dolor irremediable. Únicamente para Andrea, la joven estudiante brilla el sol de una ilusión cuando después de un año de sufrimiento y de lucha se dispone a trasladarse a Madrid en mejores condiciones de vida.6

Andrea's older uncle, Román, has once been a promising musician and capable artist but has wasted his talents. She finds him living a futile life of fantasy, filled with self-pity and a lust for vengeance against a world that he cannot change. A being with an ingrained sense of discomfort, he is contemptuous, mockingly individualistic, and rebellious toward any incorporation into the mass. Violence covers the surface and pervades the whole texture of his life, which drips with gore and vulgarity. Even though capable of much charm and some caustic understanding, he dedicates himself to

unscrupulous, often lurid, deals on the black market. With a foul mouth and matching disposition, he derives sadistic and sullen pleasure in hurting others, especially his brother Juan. After a grotesque life of missed opportunities, he eventually surrenders to his failures by stoically committing suicide.

The other uncle, Juan, a mediocre painter haunted by feelings of inferiority, is perhaps the weakest member of the abnormal family. Andrea says of his lack of ability as a painter: "Juan pintaba trabajosamente y sin talento, intentando reproducir pincelada a pincelada aquel fino y elástico cuerpo [de Gloria]. A mí me parecía una tarea inútil." Habitually submissive before his dominant brother, Juan compensates for his failure by fiercely hating his wife and young son, both of whom he treats with vicious brutality. Well aware of his wife's unfaithfulness, he feigns ignorance of it partly out of love for her, partly because he despises himself, and chiefly because of inability to face the truth. The fact that his chances of enjoyment of real happiness in such a situation are slim seems never to occur to him.

Gloria, Juan's wife, has smothered her own anguish and vain resentment as she gradually became resigned to a dull and poverty-ridden existence. She prides herself

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7Carmen Laforet, *Nada* (Barcelona, 1944), p. 36.
on accepting bigot's slurs as honorable wounds, yet her fatal charm somehow carries with it a potentiality for disaster as she insidiously destroys her cuckolded husband. Lacking any true understanding of human good and evil she has been incapable of conceiving a desire for love. She might be described as a child of nature whose carnal impulses have enslaved her in a state of alternating hysteria and despondency and left her to face a hopeless future. Andrea comments upon Gloria's physical appearance as the latter poses for her husband:

Gloria, enfrente de nosotros, sin su desastrado vestido, aparecía increíblemente bella y blanca entre la fealdad de todas las cosas, como un milagro del Señor. Un espíritu dulce y maligno a la vez palpitaba en la grácil forma de sus piernas, de sus brazos, de sus finos pechos. Una inteligencia suave y diluida en la cálida superficie de la piel perfecta. Algo que en sus ojos no lucía nunca.²

Andrea's aunt, Angustias, a somewhat courageous and haughty character, is a no less frustrated, febrile, sickly, and tormented introvert than Román and Juan. Soulless and unable to find meaning in life, she has the face of someone to whom nothing has happened; or, perhaps, to whom so much has happened that each event has wiped out all that had happened before. Only recently rather pretty, she already is becoming a bit eccentric and at times seems to border upon senility. One might describe

²Tbid., pp. 36-37.
her as locked in some private shelter of a fearful mind. Drowning in a sea of unrequited passion, she seeks an escape from her miserable existence by fleeing to a convent. Her painful journey toward redemption tends to obscure her more serious defects, yet fails to have in adequate measure the redeeming ingredient of sincerity.

Andrea's grandmother, who has wrung life dry and is awaiting only death, seems indifferent and weak in the morbid surroundings in which she finds herself. Though not easily daunted by the unwholesome atmosphere, she retires into a highly refined loneliness as if fearing infection. The hazy images that her memory supplies shield her inwardly and outwardly from her present environment.

Andrea, the protagonist and supposed narrator of the story faces courageously poverty and unattractive surroundings, remaining effervescent and cheerful in her infectious good-heartedness within a sea of unwholesomeness. As if fascinated, she surveys the constantly quarrelling, decadent family and even though acutely aware of the sickness which has engulfed its members, she is not appalled. She shows herself to be charming, awkward, not overemotional, and desperately anxious to please. She is able to retain some faith amidst the ugly shadows of her relatives' existence, and her sound
common sense enables her to spot the seeds of madness growing in their minds. Such experiences, however, do not leave Andrea a child; her maturation becomes apparent as the novel progresses. Carmen Laforet writes of her own heroine:

Andrea—la protagonista de esta novela—busca entre unos seres, en una atmósfera de vida desquiciada por las circunstancias, algo a lo que su educación le ha dado derecho a esperar; una verdad en las convicciones, una limpieza de la vida, un ideal fuerte que le resuella el sentido de la existencia.\(^9\)

How Andrea can remain normal among half-mad degenerates headed for the insane asylum and the jail is a puzzle, for catastrophe seems to lurk in their midst like germs of a dread disease. All that transpires from the time of the heroine's arrival in Aribau Street until her final departure the following year impresses the reader as a kind of nightmare.

Not long after her arrival, Andrea begins to wander the streets of Barcelona in search of new ties of security and some degree of relief from the fears and frustrations that inevitably result from her association with her relatives. Eventually she is able to find a temporary avenue of escape in her friendship with her schoolmate, Ena. The latter, a minor character in the novel, is a

\(^9\)Carmen Laforet, Mis páginas mejores (Madrid, 1956), p. 15.
modest though well-to-do girl who is endowed with a captivating personality. Becoming acquainted at the University, Ema and the heroine are soon frequent, if not constant, companions. Despite the closeness of their friendship, it is not until late in the novel that Andrea divulges to Ema the secret of the conditions of her home life.

Carmen Laforet writes of her characters' inner cataclysms and defects in a tone as controlled as the featureless faces they present to the world. The uncomfortable life of the six principal characters is briefly but well summarized by Jerónimo Malloc:

La vida de las seis personas es una continua tortura. Sufre la abuela viendo sufrir a sus hijos, que al parecer se odian. Sufre la hija por la frustración irremediable de su vida. Sufre el hijo Román por efecto de morbosos complejos de su existencia turbia. Sufre Juan por su fracaso y su miseria. Y sufre su mujer, Gloria, por los malos tratos que recibe. También sufre Andrea, en la fría soledad de aquel núcleo familiar sin cariño, haciendo frente ella sola, incomprendida, a las dificultades de su vida de estudiante pobre. Hay en la novela otros personajes que dan variedad al relato y alivian de tanto en tanto la tensión de los episodios dolorosos.10

Much of the first part of the book is devoted to describing the setting, confined to a large extent to the house on Aribau Street. Carmen Laforet, however, seems less intent on analyzing the morbid environment

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10 Jerónimo Malloc, "Caracterización y valor del tremendismo," Hispania, XXXIX (March, 1956), 51.
than upon studying the characters as the heroine actually finds them. Very little, for example, is disclosed of their lives prior to Andrea’s arrival in Barcelona. One must add that Lefebre seems to be at her best when describing such deluded, tortured souls unable to adjust to life.

To discuss now the action of the novel, its protagonist reaches Barcelona with feelings of expansiveness toward her new surroundings. Domingo Pérez Minik describes as follows her mood upon arrival:

Andrea llega a Barcelona, resumiendo grandes ilusiones, cargada de optimismo, con el ánimo joven y alegre. Llega, después de la guerra civil, y, cuando llega, desconocemos su anterior situación espiritual o física. Nos damos cuenta de que llega con hambre, con vestido estropeado y con ganas de escapar de algo que la acosa. Viene a estudiar, no tiene dinero y está poseída de una ansiosa expectación.11

The wheels of tremendismo are at once set into motion and the design of the work steadily unfolds.

Andrea describes her initial impression upon encountering the decrepit old house on Aribau Street and the depressing, mysterious feeling that immediately befell her:

Levanté la cabeza hacia la casa frente a la cual estábamos. Filas de balcones se sucedían iguales con su hierro oscuro, guardando el secreto de las viviendas. Los mírē y no pude adivinar cuáles serían aquellos a los que en adelante yo me asomaría. Con la mano un poco temblorosa di unas

monedas al vigilante, y cuando él cerró el portal detrás de mí, con gran temblor de hierro y cristales, comenzó a subir muy despacio la escalera, cargada con mi maleta.12

The world that unfolds for Andrea is ominous from the start. In its dreary confines the aberrant have made and lived by their own conventions. Andrea's first look into the gloomy apartment continues the vein of tremen-
dismo that was initiated in the initial paragraphs:

En toda aquella escena había algo angustioso, y en el piso un calor sofocante como si el aire estuviera estancado y podrido. Al levantar los ojos vi que habían aparecido varias mujeres fantasmales. Casi sentí erizarse mi piel al vislumbrar a una de ellas, vestida con un traje negro que tenía trazas de camisón de dormir. Todo en aquella mujer parecía horrible y desastrado, hasta la verdosa dentadura que me sonreía. La seguía un perro, que bostezaba ruidosamente, negro también el animal, como una prolongación de su luto. Luego me dijeron que era la criada, pero nunca otra criatura me ha producido impresión más desagradable.13

Even more startling is the picture that unfolds as Andrea's relatives emerge one by one like specters from their gloomy atmosphere of retreat and retrenchment to greet her. The morbidity of the surroundings seems to intensify steadily as Andrea continues to observe:

Lo que estaba delante de mí era un recibidor alumbrado por la única y débil bombilla que 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. Y en primer término la

12 Carmen Leforet, Nada (Barcelona, 1944), p. 13.
The dire economic straits into which the family has fallen are emphasized by the shabby, filthy apartment with its dark corners and unfamiliar odors. Sordid sights and sounds abound. Andrea comments upon the condition of the bathroom:

Parecía una casa de brujas aquel cuarto de baño. Las paredes tiznadas conservaban la huella de manos ganchudas, de gritos de desesperanza. Por todas partes los desconchados abrían sus bocas desdentadas resumentes de humedad. Sobre el espejo, porque no cabía en otro sitio, habían colocado un bodegón macabro de besugos pálidos y cobayas sobre fondo negro. La locura sonreía en los grifos torcidos.¹⁵

One might say that the author herself reacts through the protagonist to the setting described. Placing herself in the heroine’s position, she appears to experience each emotion attributed to the latter. Her stylistic task, it seems, is merely to control and direct that which is spontaneously seeking to express itself.

When, at last, Andrea finds herself alone for the first time since her arrival in Aribau Street, she reacts in the following way to her cold and griny surroundings:

Al fin se fueron, dejándose con la sombra de los muebles que la luz de la vela hinchaba llenando de palpitations y profunda vida. El hedor que se advertía en toda la casa llegó en una ráfaga más fuerte. Era un olor a porquería de gato. Sentí que me ahogaba y trepé en peligroso alpinismo sobre el respaldo de un sillón, para abrir una puerta que aparecía entre cortinas de terciopelo y polvo. Pude lograr mi intento en la medida que los muebles lo permitían y vi que comunicaba con una de esas galerías abiertas que dan tanto luz a casas barcelonesas. Tres estrellas temblaban en la suave negrura de arriba y al verlas tuve unas ganas sábanas de llorar, como si vieran amigos antiguos, bruscamente recobrados. 16

Soon Carmen Laforet shifts Andrea's attentions abruptly from the sordid surroundings to her personal relationships with the various members of the family. In rapid succession the heroine witnesses diverse aspects of their abusive treatment of each other and the constant suffering from which they have little hope of escape. Her early sympathetic inclinations are rapidly checked by a series of harsh scenes of friction. The desperation and antagonism of these neurotic characters at odds with themselves and with each other contribute greatly to intensify the atmosphere of tremendismo that was created at the beginning of the novel. The following short scene is typical of the violent associations encountered with regularity by Andrea early in the novel.

Creí que mi tío se había vuelto loco y miré atemorizada hacia la puerta. Juan había venido a oír las voces.

16 Ibid., pp. 18-19.
—¡Me estás provocando, Román!—gritó.

—¡Tú, a sujetarte los pantalones y a callar!—dijo Román, volviéndose hacia él.

Juan se acercó con la cara contraída y se quedaron los dos en la actitud, al mismo tiempo ridícula y siniestra, de gallos de pelea.

—¡Pégame, hombre, si te atreves!—dijo Román—. ¡Me gustaría que te atrevieras!

—¡Pégarte? ¡Matarte! ... Te debiera haber matado hace mucho tiempo. ...

Juan estaba fuera de sí, con las venas de la frente hinchadas, pero no avanzaba un paso. Tenía los puños cerrados.

Román le miraba con tranquilidad y empezó a sonreírse.

—Aquí tienes mi pistola—le dijo.

—No me provoques. ¡Canalla! ... No me provoques o ...

—¡Juan!—gritó Gloria—. ¡Ven aquí!

El loro empezó a gritar encima de ella, y la vi excitada bajo sus despeinados cabellos rojos. Nadie le hizo caso. Juan la miró unos segundos.

—Aquí tienes mi pistola!

Decía Román, y el otro apretaba más los puños. Gloria volvió a chillar.

La rabia de Juan se desvió en un instante hacia la mujer y le empezó a insultar. Ella gritaba también y al fin lloró.

Román les miraba divertido; luego se volvió hacia mí y dijo tranquilamente:

—No te asustes, pequeña. Esto pasa aquí todos los días.  

---Tbid., pp. 29-30.
The heroine remarks shortly after the incident just transcribed:

Con frecuencia me encontré sorprendida, entre aquellas gentes de la calle de Aríbau, por el aspecto de tragedia que tomaban los sucesos más nimios, a pesar de que aquellos seres llevaban cada uno un peso, una obsesión real dentro de sí, a la que pocas veces aludían directamente.18

Andrea is swiftly shifted from one type of personal relationship to another as she finds opportunity to converse at length with each of her relatives. Alternately she strangely experiences both aversion and attraction with respect to each member of the family. At times the inconsolable sorrow and brooding that reflect the defection of these beings seem almost to hypnotize the young girl. In her simple loyalty, Andrea is moved readily by the desires and frustrations of others; and though often entranced by their evil behavior, she is never pleased by it. Pérez Minik comments upon the evident progression of disharmony and bitterness among Andrea's relatives:

Hemos de afirmar, además, que la osadía y el candor de Carmen Leforet no fueron sólo visibles en la hora de la iniciación de la novela, sino que estructuran un ritmo y una presencia, mantenidos a lo largo de la misma. Es una obra que va creciendo en dificultades al paso de las hojas. Los personajes se van haciendo no más complejos, sino más corpóreos. El aire se enriquece, macerado por un oscuro dramatismo. El hilo del asunto se apelota hasta

18 Ibid., p. 62.
convertirse en una red a la dama, tendida en el mar.19

Within a short time each of Andrea's relatives, jealous of her interest and sympathy, attempts to instill in her distrust and disfavor toward other members of the family. In desperation from her own loneliness, Angustias is the first to solicit the confidence of the heroine, with whom she seeks to build a closer friendship to the detriment of the others. Her first attempt is to turn Andrea against Gloria with these words:

Tu tío Juan se ha casado con una mujer nada conveniente. Una mujer que está estropeando su vida... Andrea; si yo algún día supiera que tú eras amiga de ella, cuenta con que me darías un gran disgusto, con que yo me quedaría muy apenada.20

Román also attempts to win the affection and confidence of Andrea. As he copes with defeated dreams and in absence of future hopes, he attempts to persuade her that there is no need for her to have friends outside the family:

—Si necesitara amigos los tendría, los he tenido y los he dejado perder. Tú también te hartarás de todo... ¿Qué persona hay, en este cochino y bonito mundo, que tenga bastante interés para aguantarlo? Tú también mandarás a la gente al diablo dentro de poco, cuando se te pase el romanticismo de colegiala por las anistadas.21

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20Carmen Lefort, Hada (Barcelona, 1944), p. 37.

21Ibid., p. 89.
Román's cultivated attitude of superiority and his abuse of Juan and Gloria, however, leave Andrea far from sympathetic toward him.

Underlying the fierce hostility and constant bickering among the members of this family is an unknown force or concealed axis of evil which prevents their separation. Román even declares to Andrea: "Ninguno en esta casa necesita amigos. Aquí nos bastamos a nosotros mismos." 22 Juan reacts violently to Román's provocative language and vulgar remarks to Gloria but defends him in his absence. Román harshly criticizes Angustias' futility but admits: "Cuando se vaya la querré." 23 He also abuses Juan's wife in the presence of the others, but discreetly seeks an opportunity to enjoy the love which Gloria has showed him during the war years.

At the University Andrea finds partial relief from the discord and chaos of the house on Aribau Street. At first, however, her relationships with more normal people do not prove entirely satisfactory either:

Yo me sentaba siempre en el último banco y a ella [Ena] le reservaban un sitio sus amigos, en la primera fila. Durante toda la explicación del profesor yo estuve con la imaginación perdida. Me juré que no mezclaría aquellos dos mundos que se empezaban a destacar tan claramente en mi vida; el de mis amistades de estudiante con su fácil cordialidad y el sucio y poco acogedor de mi casa. Mi deseo de hablar de la música de Román, de la

22 Ibid., p. 89. 23 Ibid., p. 108.
rojiza cabellera de Gloria, de mi pueril abuela vagando por la noche como un fantasma, me pareció idiota.\textsuperscript{24}

Though for a time her shyness and introversion brought about by a repressive home life prevent the heroine from fitting smoothly into the student world, she finds a refreshing influence in Ena, whose friendship enables her to escape her home environment momentarily. Away from the discouraging effects of those surroundings, she responds eagerly to wholesome associations and acquires still other friends. The relationship between Andrea and Ena becomes disrupted, however, when the latter is drawn toward Román, with whom she is infatuated despite the fact that she desires above all to hurt him as a means of avenging her mother's youthful sufferings when in love with the same man. Andrea finds herself alone again as Ena avoids her. "La vida," the heroine states, "volvia a ser solitaria para mí."\textsuperscript{25} At this time Andrea attempts to establish new ties with a Bohemian group at the University.

Eventually the disruptive elements within the family prove to be stronger than the mysterious and tenuous magnetic force that has held it together. For reasons not apparent to the others in the family, Angustias flees to a convent. The others' hostility

\textsuperscript{24}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 62-63. \textsuperscript{25}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 152.
even follows her to the train station where Juan shouts even at the last moment: "¡Eres una mezquina! ¿Me oyes?" The departure of Angustias enables Andrea to move freely and to spend much more time away from the house on Aribau Street. Angustias, it need be explained, had previously restricted her by ominous warnings:

La ciudad, hija mía, es un infierno. Y en toda España no hay una ciudad que se parezca más al infierno que Barcelona. ... Estoy preocupada con que anoche vinieras sola desde la estación. Te podías haber pasado algo. Aquí vive la gente aglomerada, en acecho unos contra otros. Toda prudencia en la conducta es poca, pues el diablo reviste tentadoras formas. ... Una joven en Barcelona debe ser como una fortaleza. ¿Me entiendes?

The story continues to move rapidly with the nebulousness and suspense of a novel of mystery as chapter by chapter Andrea is tossed between two poles of discord, one her association with her violent and bickering family, the other her more peaceful existence within the world outside the house of la abuela.

Sherman Koff summarizes as follows a chapter of Hada, which seems to show particularly well the conditions in which the heroine finds herself:

Chapter XVII is typical. While cleaning her room Andrea ponders her estrangement from Ema, feeling "amargamente defraudada" in her desire to believe in "la belleza y la verdad de los sentimientos humanos" (203). She is interrupted by Román's ironical remarks, which in turn evoke a bitter

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26 Ibid., p. 111. 27 Ibid., pp. 25-26.
reply from Juan directed against his niece. Juan's reaction expands into a cruel beating of his wife, while Andrea "egotisticamente" withdraws to take a shower. The scene now shifts to a gathering in a young artist's study. Here Andrea accepts an invitation to a dance, though experiencing "la sensación molesta que el enamoramiento de Pous me producía" (209). She returns home, where, unseen, she watches Román's arrogant and futile attempt to recapture Gloria's love. The next morning, with an impulse to protect Ena by revealing Román's duplicity, she hurriedly locates her friend but is suddenly overcome with distrust and fear, abandons her good intention, and flees. On arriving home, she sees Román's dog escaping from his master's room with one ear bleeding from a wound inflicted "por los dientes de Román." 28

In succeeding chapters the disruptive elements stir the family more savagely. Even though Román, with regularity, criticizes Juan's wife with such remarks as, "Hasta la imbécil de tu mujer se burla ya de ti, Juan; ten cuidado ..."; 29 there is witnessed through the eyes of the heroine an unsuccessful effort on his part to recapture Gloria's love. This attempt at adultery, coupled with the unfavorable outcome of his relationship with Ena, triggers the fit of despondency which ends with his unexpected, violent, and bloody suicide. It is this act that gives the reader a full, vivid awareness of Roman's morbid perceptions and his doom to failure by his own pretensions. His mind, one discovers, has been

28 Sherman Hoff, "Nada by Carmen Laforet," Hispania, XXXV (May, 1952), 208.

29 Carmen Laforet, Nada (Barcelona, 1944), p. 34.
buried alive in wreckage caused by the disease of not being able to accept whatever situation he could no longer improve.

Román's suicide is, however, one of the few physically brutal or violent scenes in Nada. The violence which may be said to pervade the book is seldom physical. It is instead the brutality of a sordid atmosphere, fierce antagonisms, and the desperation of the characters. Jerónimo Mallo comments on it in this way:

No hay en esta obra crímenes, ni más derramamiento de sangre que el de la de una de sus personas al degollarse con la navaja de afeitar. Pero corre por todas sus páginas el estremecimiento de un dolor íntimo e inevitable que por diferentes causas sufren intensamente las seis personas que, unidas por el parentesco y separadas por el desvío, conviven en un destetralado piso de la barcelonesa calle de Aribau.30

It seems appropriate to suggest that, in an age that suppresses its tantrums as impolite, part of Carmen Laforet's cathartic appeal to her audience stems from the opportunity she affords it to act out its hostilities vicariously.

The effect of Román's suicide upon his family is nightmarish. New tensions which develop, together with those already present, appear accentuated by an uncanny emanation of evil. The incidents and details that

produce such an impression are well described by Andrea as she tells of her own feelings and the reaction of the family to the unexpected death. The shock she receives as Antonia screams upon finding Román's corpse is described in terms which set the general tone: "Era un chillido lúgubre, de animal enloquecido, el que me hizo sentarme en la cama y luego saltar de ella temblando."\textsuperscript{31}

Gloria next feebly attempts to rationalize the death of Román by offering an explanation, which Andrea chooses to ignore:

\begin{quote}
Yo no creía nada de lo que Gloria me decía. Era más verosímil figurarse que 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.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

Andrea's own explanation of the occurrence is as follows:

"La idea de degollarse debió de ser un rapto repentino, una rápida locura que le atacó mientras se afeitaba. Tenía las mejillas manchadas de jabón cuando lo descubrió Antonia."\textsuperscript{33}

For a time Andrea appears relatively indifferent to the situation created by the shocking event, and her comments are limited to conveying the reactions of others in the family. Only later does she herself thoroughly comprehend that a death has actually occurred in the

\textsuperscript{31}Carmen Laforet, \textit{Nada} (Barcelona, 1944), p. 282.

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 287-288.

\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 287.
house. The impression is borne out by her statement:
"Me acuerdo de que no llegué a creer verdaderamente en el hecho físico de la muerte de Román hasta mucho tiempo después."34

Juan's reaction to his brother's death is perhaps the most startling of all. He seems overcome by all the cumulative weight of complication, subterfuge, and disorder, while within his mind a blurred picture never comes completely into focus. At times he is seen emotionally drained and stupefied by the dark event, at others he is in a whirl, uncertain of direction but hounded, agonized, and moving with a frenzy. His combination of savagery and detachment as well as tension without release and motion without direction cause him to behave like an arrested adolescent. Andrea says of him:

Cuando un día o una noche le vi por fin en casa yo creí que ya habíamos pasado los peores momentos. Pero aún nos faltaban oírle llorar. Nunca, por muchos años que viva, me olvidaré de sus gémidos desesperados. Comprendí que Román tenía razón al decir que Juan era suyo. Ahora que él se había muerto, el dolor de Jual era impávido, enloquecedor, como el de una mujer por su amante, como el de una madre joven por la muerte del primer hijo.35

Shortly after Román's death, Andrea herself prepares to depart from Barcelona. The final dissolution of the

family is described by Boff in the following manner:

These recurring swells of excitement, however are but sub-developments in a total movement that is essentially oscillatory, where the various characters, after whirling like atoms in an electric current, separate themselves from the area of disturbance or eventually explode. Thus Angustias flies off at a tangent, seeking refuge in a convent; Román disintegrates literally by way of suicide; while Andrea is finally cast free after suffering the dizziness of her agitated excursion, while Juan continues on in the eddies of a storm that has spent its force.36

The immediate cause of Andrea's decision to leave the house on Aribau Street is her receipt of a letter from Ena containing the welcome invitation. Andrea at once informs the family that she has decided to leave for Madrid. Their last meal together before her departure seems a bit out of keeping with the general tone of the novel since all of Andrea's relatives bid her farewell with kindness and affection. A definite parallel between the first and last chapters is discernable as the protagonist says:

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 de plenitud, la alegría, el interés profundo, el amor. De la casa de la calle de Aribau no me llevaba nada. Al menos, así creía yo entonces.37


37 Carmen Laforet, Nada (Barcelona, 1944), p. 302.
As the burden of a year's life in an unwholesome environment is lifted, Andrea's final comment is:

El aire de la mañana estimulaba. El suelo aparecía mojado con el rocío de la noche. Antes de entrar en el auto alcé los ojos hacia la casa donde había vivido un año. Los primeros rayos del sol chocaban contra sus ventanas. Unos momentos después, la calle de Aríbau y Barcelona entera quedaban detrás de mi.38

The most troublesome shortcoming of Nada may be for many readers its blandly inconclusive ending. Certain literary critics have called the abrupt conclusion of the novel artificial, contrived or unmotivated; Carmen Laforet herself confesses a certain inability to rewrite or to polish her works, admitting a preoccupation with their other aspects:

Comprendo que no tengo la larga paciencia del genio. Al menos, en cuanto al estilo me es imposible corregir un libro. Si alguna página mia suena en un castellano correcto y armónico, es porque así salió de pluma, espontáneamente. Y no protestaría si algún crítico juzga que no hay ninguna con estas cualidades. Aun viendo repeticiones de palabras muy fáciles de sustituir, al leer unas galeradas, es raro que las corrija, porque, preoccupada por la idea general del libro, las olvido.39

One of Carmen Laforet's most ardent admirers, however, attributes the abrupt conclusion to Nada to quite a different cause:

38Ibid., p. 303.

Fiel a su tiempo, Carmen Lao ret no tiene paciencia para seguir una vida que, por lo general, suele tener dos o tres grandes momentos; pero sólo eso: dos o tres. Y a esta genial novelista muestra, lo que le va a interesar sin duda principalmente en la vida es esto: lo fundamental de las vidas, su meollo; la gran crisis en que se resuelve el pasado y se define el porvenir. El "momento" para que fué creada la vida. A partir de él, ¿qué, sino ceniza? Y antes, ¿qué, sino preparación? Ella, la autora—esa mujer joven que al final de Nada coge su maleta y se va al futuro—, hará siempre lo mismo: quedarse libre, ágil, ligera, para seguir viendo sucesivos momentos de las vidas humanas atormentadas.

Such disagreement as to the significance of the conclusion of the book is typical of the controversies to which it has given rise. To many critics it is an indictment of present-day Spain; some emphasize its autobiographical aspects or even attempt to identify its characters; still others discover in it philosophical overtones. Nearly all, however, stress the dark violence of its world and speak of its tremendismo.

The words of Pérez Minik, for example, might be cited to bear out the statement concerning such areas of disagreement and general agreement:

*Esta obra de Carmen Lao ret presenta muchas notas de valoración contemporáneas. Una veracidad subjetiva singular, un gran sentido antifariseico crítico, una cierta categoría testimonial. Nada sigue siendo uno de los más sugestivos documentos de la sociedad española de postguerra. Se percibe claramente que la autora, cuando escribió su libro,*

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40 Florentina Del Mar, "Nada o la novela atómica," *Cuadernos de literatura contemporánea* (June, 1946), pp. 651-662.
no tenía ningún contenido "ideológico" definido, ningún prejuicio social, ninguna conciencia dirigida o comprometida. Y si tenía todas estas cosas, no cabe duda que estaban muy bien enmascaradas. Es difícil deducir de Nada un mensaje concreto, ni una elaboración intelectual, ni una filosofía de las que andan por el mundo. Coincide con la novela moderna en la sordidez de su realidad, en la negrura y desesperanza de sus habitantes, en la angustia que descubre, en la fugaz intención crítica de su autobiografía, en la circunstancia expresiva de tanta condición humana y en otras muchas cosas.41

The foregoing affirmation is in no way contradicted by Carmen Laforet's own statement of her objectives as a novelist:

Lo que a mí, como novelista, me preocupa en mis libros, lo que soy capaz de destruir enteramente y volver a hacer de nuevo cuantas veces sea necesario, es su estructura y también su vida. Me preocupa huir del ensayo, huir de explicar mis propias opiniones culturales, que considero muy poco interesantes, y dar aquello para lo que me creo dotada: la observación, la creación de la vida. Me preocupa el vigor de los personajes y la manera de exponer los hechos para que resulten claros a la luz mía, individual, y me preocupa el que estos hechos queden objetivamente expuestos para que el lector pueda juzgarlos por sí mismo, interesarse por ellos, aceptarlos o rechazarlos a su gusto.42

In this connection it seems appropriate to introduce the remarks of the noted poet Juan Ramón Jiménez, contained in a letter to Carmen Laforet:

Acabo de leer "Nada", este primer libro suyo, que me llegó, en segunda edición, de Madrid. Le escribo,

41 Domingo Pérez Minik, Novelistas españoles de los siglos XIX y XX (Madrid, 1957), p. 274.

42 Carmen Laforet, Mis páginas mejores (Madrid, 1956), p. 8.
interrumpiendo la lectura, por su ... no, para decirle que la agradezco la belleza tan humana de su libro; mucha parte, sin duda, un libro de uno mismo y más de lo que suele creerse, sobre todo un libro como el de usted, que se le ve matizarse, hoja tras hoja, de la sustancia propia de su escritora. 43

Indeed, the greatest accomplishment of Nada is its sharp, clear, and moving portrayal of a human experience deeply felt by the heroine, accompanied by an accumulation of swift, vivid, but simple literary strokes. This combination results in an almost feverish intensity, which makes the novel memorable.

It may be said also that Nada is like a storm between two periods of calm. It begins and ends peacefully, but in between are the tidal waves of human ruin and scenes in which the raw horror of the characters' deeds gives a macabre substance to their actions. Carmen Laforet has made tangible for the reader that atmosphere of boredom, anguish and hopelessness characteristic of postwar Barcelona. The people, the defeatists and the psychological freaks, and the distraught situations are strangely real and say much of human conditions of this period. Its profound probings of the human soul are not intended to shock but they are not joking either. In this bitter, raucous life among the wretched, Carmen Laforet seems

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less intent on merely presenting a sequence of painful, chaotic protests against the condition of her characters' lives than on fashioning a slice of life that depicts the tone of tremendismo.

It may be concluded that Nada is faithful to the literary components essential to tremendismo—estranged people moved by cruel forces beyond their immediate control. The novel is typically tremendista in that the characters are pitiful souls infected by self-disgust and madness, haunted by despair and fear, and doomed to depraved, dispirited, and guilty lives. Nada is a vision of tremendista life. It is dark and narrow; it lacks the fuller resources of faith and love, but it is desperately honest. There seems to remain little doubt as to why critics have acclaimed Nada as one of the prototypes of the novel of tremendismo.
CHAPTER III

LA ISLA Y LOS DEMONIOS

In 1952, seven years after the appearance of Nada, Carmen Laforet's long-awaited second novel, La isla y los demonios, was published. The basic theme and construction of this work are definitely similar to those of Nada. It too is the story of a young girl's attempt to escape from an unwholesome environment. However, contrary to what one might expect, Laforet's Nada constitutes, as regard to time, action, and characterization, a sequel to La isla y los demonios. The action of the former work begins where that of the latter terminates. Luis Alborg compares Laforet's first two novels in the following terms:

Al fin La isla y los demonios vino a demostrar que Carmen Laforet era capaz de dar nuevamente en la diana. Tengo para mí que esta segunda novela no desmerece en absoluto de la primera, y que sus cualidades e incluso sus defectos, son idénticos. Sin embargo, hasta los más entusiastas panegiristas de Nada regatearon méritos a la segunda novela de Laforet o le encontraron esta o aquella deficiencia. Semejantes apreciaciones que, a mi ver, son por completo injustas, demuestran, en cambio, la existencia de los citados <<factores ocasionales>> en el popular triunfo de Nada. Si La isla y los demonios hubiera sido el Nadel de 1944, habría recogido la admiración de que aquélla se benefició; pero en los siete años transcurridos, había entrado
ya en plena fermentación la novela española y era difícil repetir la jugada afortunada de dar dos veces por haber dado primero. Además, la demasiada espera a que había sometido la impaciencia de los lectores era propicia a provocar en ellos cierta decepción si no cuajaba en algo excepcional.

Al no darse cuenta de que se dejaba sugestionar por estos factores subjetivos--como antes lo había sido por el efecto de la sorpresa--creo que nuestra crítica profesional no se acreditó de demasiado sagaz, pues lo que estaba justificado en el lector común era en ella una distracción imperdonable. Para mí, repito, La isla y los demonios no representaba un avance en la producción de Leforret, pero de ninguna manera un retroceso. Más bien era la confirmación por el simple hecho de haber mantenido el tomo, de que la escritora, cuya consolidación ya parecía problemática, cristalizaba en una realidad dentro de su línea.1

The setting for La isla y los demonios is Las Palmas on the island of Gran Canaria in the Canary Islands. In contrast to Nada, the location of this novel plays a more important role. The island of Gran Canaria epitomizes the tranquility that semi-tropical island landscapes seem to foster and serves as a peaceful, quiet refuge for its characters during the closing months of the Civil War. The serenity of Las Palmas, however, is overshadowed by typical tremendista elements present in the psychological make-up of the characters. The picture of provincial life presented may be said to be pervaded with tremendista undertones.

1Juan Luis Alborg, Hora actual de la novela española (Madrid, 1958), p. 150.
Carmen Leforot evidently is completely familiar with the islands, since the descriptions of the surroundings, from surf to mountain top, are effective and clearly drawn. The following examples are typical:

La bahía espejeaba. Una niebla de luz difuminaba los contornos de los buques anclados y de algunos veleros con las imítiles velas lucias. La ciudad de las velas, tendida al lado del mar, aparecía temblorosa, blanca, con sus jardines y sus palmeras.

El gran puerto había conocido días de más movimiento que aquellos de la guerra civil. De todas maneras, cajas de plátanos y tomates se apilaban en los muelles dispuestas al embarque. Oía a paja, a brezo, a polvo y yodo marino.2

Todo un pueblo troglodita se abría en la ladera de esta montaña, iluminado y como brumido por la luz amarilla del sol de la tarde. Centenares de cuevas, con las fachadas blanqueadas o pintadas de colores, se abrían unas sobre otras, con calles estrechas de piedras y barro, serpenteando entre ellas. Se olían humedades de barro oscuro y tierra roja.3

As in the case of Rada, an understanding of the characters of La isla y los demoníos is of the utmost importance, since the novel is essentially a presentation of human types which arouse interest because of their abnormality, anguish and misery. The protagonist herself, Marta Camino, is a girl of sixteen and at least as desperate as the Androa of Rada. Like the latter,

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2 Carmen Leforot, La isla y los demoníos (Barcelona, 1952), p. 2.

3 Ibid., p. 105.
she is a glowing, noble individual whose life is complicated by the necessities of living among unbalanced, unwholesome relatives. Alborg compares the two heroines in the following terms:

Marta, la protagonista, conserva semejanzas asombrosas con la Andrea de Nada, es su hermana espiritual, ha nacido de una misma preocupación, y quizá no sea equivocado el afirmar que se trata de la misma persona tomada ahora en años anteriores, en una primera etapa de su vida. Trátase, en efecto, de una muchacha inquieta, soñadora, enamorada de unos ideales que desea realizar perentoriamente, de un más allá impreciso y romántico, pero que constituye el motor y nervio de su vida. El inmediato choque con la realidad y mezquindad de aquellas gentes, en las cuales ha creído que se encarnaba su ilusión, desata—como en Nada—su íntima tragedia.

Una diferencia advierte, sin embargo, entre estas dos mujeres gemelas. La de Nada vive más a remolque de sucesos y personas que le han sido dadas como por una fatalidad; la Marta de La isla y los demonios tiene también, evidentemente, que enfrentarse con el mundo y las gentes que le rodean, pero su participación es más activa: es su inquietud la que provoca los acontecimientos, la que azuza las reacciones de los demás y desata buena parte de la peripecia novelesca. Ambas mujeres, sin embargo, son por igual el testimonio literario de la aventura espiritual de su autora durante esos años erizados en que se ha convertido en mujer.⁴

Herself thoroughly human in her eagerness and enthusiasm for life, Marta is obliged to watch her relatives become gradually more and more subhuman as they batter at each other’s dignity and sense of decency. She remains,

however, strangely irrepressible and outwardly serene amid her dreary associates and is the only normal, bright character that the reader meets in the entire book. The provincial dreariness of Gran Canaria and her brother's oppression, nevertheless, exasperate her to a degree that she can not endure indefinitely. Reasonably intelligent, generally honest, rather likeable, and considerably more sensitive than those who surround her, she instinctively seeks the affection and comprehension lacking in her environment. The development of her desire to escape and its eventual realization—an escape from the home that nourished her but at the same time was in the process of devouring her very existence—constitute the action of the novel.

Other characters of the novel possess the usual tremendista qualities which were described in the discussion of Nada. The heroine lives with her step-brother, José Camino, a sullen, unscrupulous tyrant who attempts to control her life completely. His weapons are words, vicious, cruel, and unspeakably humiliating. His abusive treatment of Marta and the browbeating of his timid wife constitute for him a source of sadistic satisfaction. Yet, underneath this usual belligerence lies a deep-seated fear of life. Although fairly well off financially, he is constantly, irremediably preoccupied
with matters of money. Given to either violent rages and shouting or to merely staring in silent disgust, he displays a moral decadence which has at its root disillusionment.

Pino, José's cross-eyed wife, is a weak individual dominated by unbearable restlessness in much the same way as Marta. Deprived of liberty and treated more like a mindless house pet than a wife, she wastes on self-pity a sentimentality which might otherwise have found expression through a display of affection for others. Bickering and toneless hysterical laughter are the outward signs of her spiritual decay. To José, marriage to this uncomplicated woman is like an inescapable hell, in which the only bond between the two is a hopeless, common damnation.

Living in a secluded part of the house is Marta's beautiful mother, Teresa. Once as wholesome and energetic as her daughter, she is a victim of mental derangement, triggered by her husband's death in a violent auto collision. José explains her condition:

No se puede decir que Teresa esté loca. ... Ella iba en el automóvil con mi padre, el día del accidente, cuando él murió. Mi madre tuvo una conmoción. ... Sin embargo, los médicos opinan que lo que Teresa tiene podía haberlo ocurrido lo mismo sin el accidente. ... Hablan de un coágulo en el cerebro. En fin, nadie sabe exactamente lo que pasa. Ella ha perdido sus facultades mentales; no habla nunca y no da muestras de conocer a nadie. Su locura, en
A self-imposed guilt and the inability to help Teresa engulf José, haunting his memory and clogging his imagination:

Caso de que se pueda llamar así, es pacífica. Está siempre en sus habitaciones. 5

Despite the inadequacies and sordidness of her immediate family, Marta's life has been relatively calm until the arrival of several relatives from the mainland:

Durante años no había pasado nada agitado ni notable en la vida de Marta. Durante dieciséis años, muertes, bodas y días tranquilos, se habían deslizado componiendo su vida en un ritmo placido. Si la guerra lo había alterado, pero aquella llegada de sus parientes fue la primera cosa que realmente conmovió su espíritu. Toda la casa pareció alborotarse y ella tuvo la sensación de que salía de su vida pasada para meterse en un mundo de sensaciones y sentimientos nuevos. 7

After expecting the ultimate in love and understanding, Marta has found the new group, which has come from the mainland of Spain to escape the turmoil of the

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5 Carmen Lapuente, La Isla y los demonios (Barcelona, 1952), p. 19.
6 Ibid., p. 68. 7 Ibid., p. 46.
Civil War, also to be made up of maladjusted individuals. Most seem radically out of touch with life, and all suffer from an inability to gauge the depth of the world around them. Bound together not by love or friendship but by a mixture of sickly attraction and grisly revulsion, they lead lives which are little more than a web of sterile, but continuing, relationships.

Among the refugees is Uncle Daniel, a hypochondriac in senile decay, whose main contribution to any conversation is a discussion of microbes or an uncontrolled, gutteral, "cloc, cloc, cloc, cloc." Like the Román of Nada, he is a musician more by default than by vocation. Having done nothing with his talent, he nevertheless wallows in self-pity because no one will notice him. His wife contemptuously refers to him as a "monigote."

Daniel's wife, Matilde, constantly complaining of everything, sneers contemptuously at Gran Canaria. "Nada de paraísos. Estas islas son terribles," she declares. Her abnormality takes the form of a completely unsentimental nature, dullness in thought, and deep loneliness.

The two individuals just mentioned are accompanied by Daniel's sister, Honesta, whose name, in the words of

8 Ibid., p. 48. 9 Ibid., p. 79.
10 Ibid., p. 12.
Cyrus DeCoster, "belyes her character." Her crude nastiness seems matched only by her air of superiority and her fluctuations in mood and personality. Marta's reaction to Honesta and Matilde is described by Laforet in the following way:

Eran horribles. Hones [Honesta] le había parecido una vieja prostituta, pero con muchas pretensiones, muchos remilgos. La otra, Matilde, pecr. Tan fría, tan «superior» y encantada con aquel viejo melindroso que tenía por marido. Gentes finas. Con las narices arrugadas por si acaso algo les daba mal olor. ¿Cómo pudo pensar que iban a traer algún cambio a su vida triste? Venían a olisquear. A estorbar.12

A fourth refugee, a talentless painter named Pablo, who has come to Las Palmas to escape arrest by the Guardia Civil, arrives with the group although he is not a member of the family. Gloomy and somehow at the same time seething with inner violence, he has virtually no confidence in his own ability and carries self-deprecation to the point of abasement. One becomes aware, however, that although limited, insensitive and immoral, he is somehow feebly trying to be decent, trying to be kind. Unlike the other refugees, he seems to have accepted his own degradation and lack of purpose and has slipped into lethargy. Despite his shortcomings, Pablo is the only


character with whom Marta finds any bond of sympathy and the only one whom she can make her somewhat unwilling confidant. His charm captures her and she falls idealistically in love with him.

All four of the refugees prove shallow, incapable of feeling, and bored with life. Marta's home becomes an asylum whose inhabitants are all lonely, half-mad, social misfits seeming to exist only on the pallid fringes of the real world. The novel has other characters, the servants and Marta's school friends, but these neither are important nor do they appear quite real.

On the basis of this novel, one must conclude that Carmen Laforet's literary growth between 1944 and 1952 was minimal. Even though Nada and La isla y los demonios are very similar in design and technique, the latter is much less intense, less profound than the former. The highly compressed tensions, the morbid decadence, the squalid existence, and the uncontrolled tantrums of Nada appear to be altered and somewhat quelled into mere brooding, self-pity and purposelessness. Morbid aspects are likewise relieved by the beauty of Gran Canaria. In essence, however, the second novel remains tremendista, as might have been predicted.

The action of La isla y los demonios is initiated by the arrival of the refugees in Las Palmas. It is not
until well into the first part of the story, however, that a definite *tremendista* ominousness is clearly suggested.

As the group motors to the house, Leforet discloses:

Pero algún día estas gentes recién llegadas sabrían que ella, Marta, había sufrido entre los recelos y la vulgaridad que escondían aquellos muros, y este pensamiento la consolaba infantilmente.

<Me sufrido.>\(^{13}\)

From that point on, Leforet shows the reader through the eyes of the heroine and in sharp detail, how the deluded relatives and Pablo involve themselves in a vicious circle of endless frustrations. As in *Hada*, the heroine seems at times to be strangely attracted toward the sordid individuals about her, although their unwholesome behavior never fails to repel her ultimately. A series of passages must be cited to illustrate her ambivalence:

El ambiente de la casa se había puesto cargado como cuando va a haber tormenta, desde el día siguiente mismo de llegar aquellas gentes. A Marta, los ambientes de la casa hasta entonces apenas la habían rozado. No le importaba nada la vida de los seres que alentaban en aquellas habitaciones. Pero llegaron tres personas de fuera que sí le importaban, porque las había creado en su propia fantasía, y las cosas que veía la asombraban y a veces la herían.\(^{14}\)

Honesta, apparently eager to deflate what she can no longer understand or discover, attempts to dishearten the heroine by sharply criticizing the latter's poetry:

\(^{13}\textit{Ibid.}, \text{ pp. 23-24.}\)

\(^{14}\textit{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 67.}\)
--Mira, te voy a decir por qué no quiero leer tus cosas. No sé si tienes talento o no. Lo más probable será que no lo tengas; pero al fin y al cabo, es lo mismo. ... Me repugna verte todo el día sin hacer nada más que pensar en ti misma. De la mañana a la noche estás pensando en ti.\textsuperscript{15}

Marta comments upon the monotony of Pino's isolation from the outside world:

El aburrimiento de su vida era enorme, y no hay nada peor que ese aburrimiento mediocre, triste, sin lucha, para el espíritu. Envejecer en esta casa, sin interés de ninguna clase por ella, éste era el porvenir de Pino. Y Pino por eso la miraba a ella con una grisaíce envidia de la que ni siquiera se daba cuenta. Pino estaba enferma de envidia por todos y de todo. Aquella enfermedad le volvía los ojos brillantes y las manos temblonas como una fiebre.\textsuperscript{16}

The almost incessant bickering is intensified by Pino's denunciation of her husband's illicit affairs with the servants, affairs which leave Marta with "ganas de vomitar."\textsuperscript{17} Pino's jealousy is clothed in whining self-pity and self-deprecation:

Pino fué de una grosería insufrible para los pacientes en los primeros días. Sólo Dios sabría lo que pasaba en su corazón, pero los molestaba de continuo. Les acuchaba. Si Marta se acercaba a alguno de ellos para conversar un rato, indefectiblemente aparecía Pino con sus zapatillas silenciosas y un: «Sigan, si no hablaban de mí. ...» que los dejaba helados.\textsuperscript{18}

The fact that José's family is relatively wealthy limits to a great extent in this novel the violent

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 72. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p. 198.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 41. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 67.
arguments about money, and the appalling destitution found in Nada is absent. José's concern for money, however, is more than frugality. It obsesses him:

Marta se asustó porque José era muy desagradable siempre hablando de cuestiones económicas, como él decía. Todas las noches hacía con Pino la cuenta de los gastos de la casa. Todas las noches discutían por eso. Él decía que no se podía malgastar un céntimo del dinero de Teresa que le estaba encomendado. Aquel día expuso a sus parientes la situación: ellos tendrían que contribuir con algo al gasto de la casa. Marta vio como Daniel se sobresaltaba. Héctor abrió mucho los ojos. Sin embargo, la cara de Matilde tomó una ligera animación. 19

Much of the quarreling, it might be mentioned, involves only José and Pino, who argue bitterly over everything and refuse to recognize each other's existence. Regardless of time or situation, Pino is prone to recoil at the least provocation into an uncontrolled tantrum, a fit of anger and hysteria such as that described in the following passage:

José dejó de comer. Se puso rojo y se le destacaron en la cara los pálidos ojos azules. Nadie supo lo que iba a decir, porque en aquel momento le entró la histeria a Pino, y todos se asustaron. Empezó a gritar, mientras arrugaba el mantel trayéndolo hacia ella. Se volcaron vasos, y corrieron agua y vino sobre el mantel, que después de empañarse, aun dejó gotear al suelo, durante un rato, aquel líquido rojizo. 20

There is similarity also in the first two novels of Carmen Laforet in that both heroines attempt to find

19 Ibid., p. 55. 20 Ibid., p. 74.
relief from their unwholesome home life by associating with classmates. In *La isla y los demonios*, Marta feels "unida a ellos mucho más que a su familia." Her friendship with Anita and Sixto, however, soon proves somewhat unsatisfactory, since basically they cannot share her longing to escape the islands.

It is Marta's relationship with Sixto which gives rise to one of the more forceful of the tremendista scenes in the novel. Even though the friendship between the two has been innocent enough, Daniel viciously insinuates that it has been indecent:

Marta tuvo la sensación de que Daniel estaba borracho. Esto era muy raro. Nunca bebía a causa de su estómago.

---¿EH? ¿Qué dices? ¿No dices nada? ... Por qué te vas? ... Yo estoy de tu parte. ...

---No me voy. ---Marta estaba un poco nerviosa.
---Es que no sé de lo que estás hablando. ...

---Oh, sí; si lo sabes. Me parece bien ese pudor; pero si sabes, sí sabes. Puedes abrirme tu pecho como a un confesor. Yo también he pecado mucho.

La última frase fue como una confidencia susurrante.

Marta sintió una vergüenza horrible. De pronto, viendo a Daniel y viendo su expresión, sus ojitos iluminados, sus manos un poco temblonas, tuvo la idea loca de echar a correr escaleras abajo, huyendo.  

Failing to dishearten the heroine with such accusations, he succeeds in instilling in José sensual notions which

lead to the most physically violent scene in La isla y los demonios:

Marta descubrió que no podía hablar. No podía despegar aquellos dientes apretados, ni bajar la cabeza. Le parecía que nunca había visto a José tan cólerico, y lo había visto muchas veces. Nunca estuvo tan desarrasada delante de él, porque allí en su fondo ella veía una razón de su enfado. Por eso, aterrada, seguía fija en su actitud insolente.

Pino se levantó de prono, descalza como estaba, con el collar de Teresa en el cuello, adornado con anillos y pendientes de Teresa.

—¿Pero no ves que es una? ... No eres hombre si no la matas!

Marta perdió su rigidez, furiosa, al oír el insulto de aquella voz.

—¡Tú no te metas!

Pino dio una especie de chillido en el momento en que José cogió a su hermana por el cuello de la blusa y la tiró materialmente contra la pared. Luego se plantó ante ella con los ojos saltones, con una actitud tan terrible que ya tocaba lo cómico.

Entonces Marta, que se había golpeado la cabeza, que veía a Pino dislocada, que notaba un extraño baile en las paredes, hizo una mueca a la que se había acostumbrado en los últimos tiempos. Sonrió.

José perdió la cabeza y empezó a cruzarle la cara a bofetones.

One of the most pathetic incidents in the story arises from Marta's seemingly uncontrollable infatuation with the painter, Pablo, whose frequent, if not constant, companion she becomes. Among the less violent of the

---bid., pp. 186-187.
characters, but in no regard the least abnormal, he has married for money an older woman, María, who smokes cigars and "No le dejaba pintar. ..." Marta's unnatural attachment to Pablo doubtlessly is due to the fact that he is the only person to notice or to comment upon her poetic endeavors. Pablo is also the first to suggest sincerely to her "tú debías salir de la isla." Marta and Pablo frequently meet and spend hours together discussing art, freedom and even Pablo's wife. Marta soon realizes that he too "estaba sufriendo." At a festival, she confesses, "Nunca ... nunca le he querido tanto como esta noche. Nunca, ni cuando me enamore, sufrí a nadie tanto como a usted." Like a man who has no time even to attempt to reach a considered opinion, Pablo replies without hesitation: "Te deseo que no te enamores, hija. Tener quince años y ser como tú. ..." The painter's scorn for her love turns Marta's life into a lurid nightmare and leaves her more alone than before. She fails to realize the shallowness of her own affection until much later, when she sees Pablo and Bonesta together: "Sin duda se habían besado. [Marta] sintió que le entraba un extraño mareo sólo de pensar que Pablo,

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aquel hombre triste y bondadoso, pudiera besar a la mujer imbécil, vieja y pintarruecas que era su tía Jones."29

The failure of her romance causes Marta's idea of escape to become as much an obsession as her unrequited love.

When she discloses her desire to leave Las Palmas, José and Pino react by emotionally exploding in a typical tremendista scene:


---Tú tienes muchos pájaros en la cabeza, Marta.
Bastante es que no te vuelva a meter interna.

---Interna ... --en la voz de Pino vibraba un recor apasionado--; interna en un buen colegio. ... En un correccional es donde tendría que estar. ...

Marta suspiró hondamente mientras Pino comenzaba su habitual ataque de nervios. Como siempre, mezclaba las acusaciones a Marta con inculpaciones a su marido y desnudos a Teresa. Como siempre, José preguntaba, perdidos los estribos:

---¿Qué tiene eso que ver?
Marta pensaba escabullirse sin ruido.

---¿Qué tiene que ver, criminal? ... ¡Criminal! Que me tienes aquí encerrada mientras otras se rían. ... ¡Mira cómo se ríe esa, mira, que la mato!

Pino se puso en pie y arrojó un cuchillo a la cabeza de Marta. La chica se agachó rápidamente y el cuchillo pasó por encima de ella. José, asustado ya, fue a calmar a su mujer, que sollozaba ahora en su fase depresiva.30

29 Ibid., p. 315. 30 Ibid., p. 199.
While the heroine is secretly making plans to escape the islands and her uncongenial family, Teresa conveniently dies, and to a certain extent Marta herself seems on her way to development of what might be called a tremendista character. Carmen Laforet describes as follows her growing indifference toward her mother and her lack of emotion at the time of the latter's death:

En los últimos años Marta había pensado muy poco en Teresa. De niña le había reclamado con insistencia, meses enteros, cuando la separaron de ella. Pero el día en que de nuevo la pusieron en su presencia lloró y pataleó, desesperado, diciendo que aquella mujer no era su madre.

Muchas veces, al crecer, había pensado que estaría más cerca de ella si Teresa hubiese muerto de veras. Entonces le habría hablado como le hablaba a su padre, y a los autores, y hasta a los personajes de sus libros favoritos, desde una gran soledad. Ahora, al fin, Teresa estaba muerta.

«No puedo llorar por ti. ... Pero mirame desde donde estás. No quiero hacer nada que tú consideres mal hecho. Mirame. Ya no me escapo.»

Después de esta infantil oración Marta cerró los ojos, y entonces vio de verdad a Teresa.31

In addition to the customary morbidness of funerals, the wake and Teresa's funeral provide some of the last clear elements of tremendismo to be found in the book. In a final bleating fit of frustration, the faithful old servant Vicenta viciously insinuates that Teresa has actually been murdered:

31 Ibid., p. 269.
Dijo claramente:

--Yo sé cómo ha muerto mi señorita Teresa. Yo juro ante Dios bendito que la envenenaron, y que sé quién lo hizo.

Todos quedaron medio segundo sobrecogidos; luego todos empezaron a hablar a la vez, casi gritando.

--Irá usted a la cárcel, Vicenta, por lo que dice. ¡No se da cuenta! ...

--¡Qué disparate! ¡No sabe usted lo que dice!

Estos dos que se oyeran eran José y don Juan. Pero todos los demás protestaron a la vez horrorizados. Llegaban a gritar. Era como si estuvieran locos; Vicenta se dejó oir de nuevo, derecha, como si fuera una piedra entre un oleaje.

--¡Le envenenó esa perra que se esconde arriba! ...
¡Y matará también a la niña!

Vicenta's accusations add to the protagonist's dismay as she finds the funeral reduced to a sordid spectacle.

 Shortly after Teresa's death the war ends and the refugees prepare to return to Spain. Little is then left to keep Marta in the islands, and José, who previously had been so violently opposed to her departure, suddenly changes his mind allowing her to accompany the relatives. As in the case of Nada, the conclusion is abrupt and seemingly unmotivated. It may at first seem small recompense for the private hells in which the characters have been wallowing.

\[32\text{Ibid.},\ p.\ 252.\]
It may be pointed out again that a definite parallel, which is too close to be anything but intentional, exists between Sade and La isla y los demonios. Of Laforet's first two novels, Torrente Ballester comments:

La isla y los demonios supera, formalmente, a Sade; la prosa se ha perfeccionado, los instrumentos se manejan con más destreza, pero la materia narrativa —trasponiendo los detalles concretos— se repite; es de la misma naturaleza, de la misma vecindad, y si en Sade su expresión parecía biográficamente forzosa, la necesidad expresiva de La isla y los demonios obedece a las causas naturales en cualquier artista. Sería la mejor novela de Carmen Laforet si no hubiese escrito Sade. 33

There is also great similarity between the two heroines, Andree and Marta. Marta is seen as a victim who refuses to act like one, a survivor who survives because she does not try to justify life. A pitiful figure untainted by self-pity, she has a stoic charm. Carmen Laforet comments:

Como en Sade el hilo argumental de la novela está unido al despertar de una juventud. Aquí, sin embargo, se trata de la maduración de una adolescencia tratada como tema de observación por el novelista. Los ensueños, las cegueras, las intuiciones y los choques con una dura realidad en el transcurso de unos meses de vida de una adolescente. ... 34

It has been shown previously that elements of tremendismo played a vital role in Sade. In La isla y los

33 Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, Panorama de la literatura española contemporánea (Madrid, 1956), p. 455.

34 Carmen Laforet, Mis páginas mejores (Madrid, 1956), p. 57.
these same components are quite evident although comparatively more tranquil. Laforet's special compas-
sion is still for the people who are not meant to win, the lost, the odd, the strange, and the difficult.

Nothing really happens to the characters; they are merely suspended before the reader for a moment of time, and then they disappear into a future no more hopeful than their past. Even though *La isla y los demonios* is a somewhat less ambitious attempt to create the same dismal atmosphere as represented in *Hades*, it nevertheless embodies well the essential characteristics of *tremendismo*.
CHAPTER IV

LA LLAMADA

The volume entitled Le llamada contains four novelties, "La llamada," "El último verano," "El noviazgo," and "El piano." Unlike Nada and La isla y los demonios, these stories offer a variety of moods and settings. No connection exists between the plots or backgrounds of any two.

One of Carmen Laforet's comments upon her short novels is of interest at this point:

Nunca me atrevería a calificar de arte menor la novela corta; hay novelas cortas sencillamente geniales. ... En verdad, sólo hay un arte que es mayor o menor según la capacidad del que lo crea; pero si puedo decir que cada artista puede volcarse enteramente en una forma de arte preferida. Para mí el gran trabajo, lento, en el que vuelco o intento volcar algo que me interesa profundamente, es la novela larga. Las novelas cortas tienen a pesar de eso una técnica distinta del cuento, necesitan un armazón argumental más sólido, pero su extensión en número de cuartillas muchas veces ha dependido para mí—como en los artículos—de necesidades editoriales.1

The elements of tremendismo which ran rampant throughout Nada and remained evident, although considerably toned down, in Le isla y los demonios are further

1 Carmen Laforet, Mis páginas mejores (Madrid, 1956), p. 91.
reduced in degree of severity and sordidness in *La llamada*. Instead of displaying self-disgust, willful self-destruction or general lack of concern for life itself, many of the characters of *La llamada* are eager to live through and beyond despair. Carmen Laforet's interest in the inconspicuous and seemingly insignificant members of society is still evident, but these characters maintain their optimism, their faith in themselves and in their loved ones, despite exhausting struggles with economic difficulties. Other individuals find some consolation and a source of strength in religion. Religious faith, seldom if ever mentioned in Laforet's two earlier novels, makes its first definite appearance in *La llamada*. However, true to *tremendista* practice, *La llamada* is still concerned to a certain extent with rather abnormal, sordid characters who are portrayed in portions of each of the stories. It might be added that these *tremendista* characterizations, typical of Laforet's earlier manner, continue to be the most effective ones. *La llamada*, to which Laforet has given sturdy form and vitality, though by no means gaiety, is striking, readable and of literary value.

The novelette from which the collection takes its title, "*La llamada,*" is the story of a middle-aged woman, Mercedes, who at one time had dramatic aspirations. She
has been married beneath her status, however, to a retired
army sergeant, with whom she lives in squalor and dissipation. Having borne seven children, of which only two
survived, she has lost her "looks" and finds little left
in life except her relatives and a host of unhappy
memories. Finally forsaking her family in order to
return to Barcelona, she seeks to realize her life-long
ambition and monomania, that of becoming a great actress.
Only a rather distant relative, Doña Eloisa, a deeply
religious individual, befriends her and encourages her
endeavors in Barcelona, and only after failing disgrace-
fully in her debut does Mercedes realize the folly of
her ambition and decide to return to her family.

Her attempt, it might be pointed out, has not been
to flee from deceived individuals as in *Nada* or *La isla
y los demonios*, but rather to escape from herself.
Although Mercedes’ character is quite within the tradi-
tion of *tremendismo*, the final picture of a woman over-
joyed at the prospect of returning to nothing is contrived
and unsatisfactory. It is, however, a measure of Leforet’s
skill that she can make the old woman so grotesque and
at the same time so sympathetic.

To analyze the story in detail, its action starts
in a desolate little port in southern Spain shortly after
the end of the Spanish Civil War. While in route to
America, Don Juan, an elderly retired physician, disembarks and by chance meets an old acquaintance, Mercedes. The first clear sign of tremendista appears in the description of Mercedes herself:

Su cara, al menos en aquella penumbra del cuartito en que don Juan la vió, casi no tenía arrugas, o no tenía ninguna. ... Pero algo terrible había pasado por ella. De aquella especie de princesilla esbelta, nerviosa, no quedaba nada. Era una mujer bondosa, descuidada, sin peinar un cabello que ya no era rubio, con las uñas sucias, partidas, y un insorportable olor a cocina que parecía venir de su bata llena de manchas y que ahogaba la atmósfera de la habitación. En un momento determinado, don Juan vió que le faltaba un diente.²

The visit of Don Juan pathetically revives Mercedes' theatrical ambitions: "Triunfar. ... Tenerles a todos a sus pies. Luego reclamarles como una reina."³ Conversation with him about events of the past fills her mind with images that slowly come to seem more real than the everyday realities around her. Within a matter of days, her hair dyed flaming red, she prepares to depart for Barcelona with only one encouraging prospect: "Doña Eloisa la ayudaría. ..."⁴ Upon arrival in Barcelona she immediately visits Doña Eloisa, who lives with her granddaughter, Lolita. This initial visit gives rise to a second tremendista scene:

³Ibid., p. 26. ⁴Ibid., p. 27.
Mercedes miraba los cuadros de las paredes, el
frutero del aparador, las blan ras cortinas de
la galería.

-¡Dios mío! ¡Qué felicidad estar aquí!

Esta exclamación no encontró eco. Otra vez un
silencio extraordinario volvió a caer sobre las
mujeres, durante un minuto lo menos. 6

El oisa, a personage at opposite poles from the
customary abnormality of Leforet's earlier characteriza-
tions, is fair, saintly, and rather sad:

Dona Eloise tenía el humilde convencimiento de que
Dios sólo había querido de ella cosas muy chiquitas
y fáciles. Había sido una administradora prudente
de humildes bienes que nunca consideró suyos, y los
habían estado vedados las grandes obras de caridad.
Ahora ni siquiera oda acaer en el cerezo de la
iglesia cien cientos, porque su nieta solía olvidar
que la yaya, a pesar de estar tan bien cuidada, tan
decentemente vestida, quizás necesitaría algo de di-
nero para un pequeño capricho. Y la yaya jamás
reclamó esto. Se consideraba con una inteligencia
muy mediana, incapaz de aconsejar a nadie más que
con el ejemplo de su alegría, y aunque jamás había
estado ociosa, consideraba que había hecho muy
pocos cosas en su vida. Que ella supiera no había
salvado a ningún pecador, y hasta tenía que su hijo,
bastante escéptico, hubiese pensado muchas veces,
el ver su fervor, que la credulidad—como él decía—
constituye reservada a los almas simples y tímidas, a
las personas insignificantes como su madre. Esto
la había llenado de angustia muchas veces, aunque
jamás lo dijo a nadie. 6

Not even critical of Mercedes' shortcomings, which
generally arouse in her only pity, Eloise with proud,
faded elegance, willingly gives her only possession of
value, a clock, to Mercedes who promptly pawns it,

5Ibid., p. 30. 6Ibid., pp. 36-37.
spending the money on a hilariously gaudy dress to be used in her stage debut.

Only after a great deal of religious soul-searching does Eloisa finally decide to attend the theatrical presentation which is to be the beginning of Mercedes' career. The latter is literally laughed off the stage:


"¡Ah, Dios mío! ...

Esta exclamación íntima de doña Eloisa se vió cortada por varias carcajadas incontrolables que estallaban en las mesas. ...

.......

Las risas se hicieron fuertes, desaforadas. Un chico joven, en traje de etiqueta, se apretaba al estómago, como si se pusiese enfermo de tanto reír. 7

The outcome of the debut causes Eloisa to go into isolated seclusion for meditation, and Mercedes, facing reality squarely for the first time since her youth, decides to return to her family.

The tremendismo of "La llamada" is only superficial and is centered around the abnormal behavior of Mercedes.

7Told., p. 56.
The customary tensions and arguments are almost entirely eliminated, and only the droll sense of the hopeless absurdity of Mercedes' theatrical ambitions remains as a reminder of Nada and La isla y los demonios. Laforet's gaze into the soul's darker corners is at times still direct, but in this novelette very little more than the shadows themselves meets the eye.

"El último verano" is the second novelette of the collection Le llamada. A trite story about the incurably ill mother of a closely knit family, it tells of the sacrifices which husband and children make to gratify the only whim she ever expressed: to spend a month at the resort of San Sebastián.

Members of the family are the mother, Doña Pepita, her husband and their three sons, Lucas, Roberto, and Luis. All fully aware of the fact that Pepita has only about one year to live, as soon as she makes her only desire known, they use every means available to see that it is realized.

It must be stated that all the violence and somberness of Laforet's earlier works dealing with family relations is absent from this novelette. Apparently one must attribute such unexpected suppression of elements of anguish, boredom, and suffering to her new concept of idealism. Little, indeed, seems to remain that could
be described as *tremendismo*. Not even the eventual death of Pepita is *tremendista* since she is actually aware of her impending doom and has been able to reconcile herself to it. Her existence is depicted as a state in which pain and pleasure, life and death are the same thing. The family is rather poor, but no conflicts or arguments concerning money matters occur. Even the financial arrangements for the trip cause little uneasiness.

The one individual in this novelette with a personality bordering on the *tremendista* is the youngest son, Luis. The only character to some extent troubled by thoughts, victimized by complexes, and haunted by a feeling of insecurity, he wanders idealistically in search of freedom and independence somewhat as did Andrea of *Nada* and Marta of *La isla y los demonios*. He possesses, however, little of the optimism of these two earlier protagonists. Like them he is a student, but "mal humorado y distinto,"\(^8\) rather than hopeful of better things. His older brother, Lucas, keeps him constantly on the defensive but is to no degree comparable to the abnormal characters of *Nada* or *La isla y los demonios*. Luis' failure at school causes him to be obsessed with the prospect of a life of aimless vagabondage, which he finds rather attractive:

De pronto a Luis se le vino a la memoria que él tenía la posibilidad de empezar una vida de vagabondo auténtico. ...

Cuántos muchachos ha habido que por menos de lo que a él le sucedía, se han escapado de sus casas, empezando una vida libre y solitaria, buscando el pan de cada día. Estos muchachos, andando el tiempo, se convierten en hombres célebres, han sido conquistadores de mundos, millonarios, escritores célebres. ...\(^9\)

In "El último verano" Carmen Laforet has clearly substituted for the grim, abnormal characters and events of her earlier works a new content suggested by her new-found idealism and optimism.

Following the order of appearance, the next novelette of the collection is "El noviazgo," the somber, pitiful tale of a middle-aged spinster, Alicia, whose entire adult life has been dominated by an unrequited love for her employer, De Arco. Finally, a widower and having lost active interest in his business, De Arco proposes marriage. Alicia antagonizes the old man, however, with her emphatic insistence upon a very elaborate wedding, and De Arco indifferently dissolves her life-long dream by marrying another woman.

As in "El último verano," little evidence of tremendo
dismo can be found in "El noviazgo." The scant amount which can be picked out resides almost entirely in the

\(^9\)Tbid., p. 109.
personality of Alicia, in her inability to face reality and live in the present.

Efficient in her work yet frustrated and humorless, she has developed through the years of unrequited devotion to De Arco a false vivacity and mannerisms out of keeping with her age of fifty. Having heard of his youthful donjuanism, she has fallen in love with him even before seeing him. Her illusory hope of becoming his wife has been nourished for some thirty years.

De Arco, a wealthy man and one who for some time has been gradually placing his affairs "en manos de sus sobrinos,"10 decides after the death of his wife and young son to live out his life with as little confusion and inconvenience as possible. Through the years he has maintained the employment of Alicia for the same reason for which he keeps his old, grandiose auto: convenience and ostentation. Struggling not to be crippled by memories and loneliness, he finally asks this fragile woman to marry him. One of the main impediments causing the failure of his plan lies inside himself, in his own acute sense of the absurdity of such a grotesque union.

In "El noviazgo," rather long conversations between Alicia, her mother, and De Arco take the place of the action. In their course little suggestion of tremendismo

10Ibid., p. 130.
is present. In one incident, however, Alicia proves her inability to face life squarely as she replies to De Arco's proposal: "Lo sé, ... no puedo pensar nada. ... Usted me permitirá que lo piense. ... Tengo, ... tengo que consultar con mi madre. ..." At other times, she wallows in despair, falling easily into childish tantrums. The final scene in the novelette provides one of the better examples of this:

¿Es su última palabra, señor De Arco?

Nacaramente que es mi última palabra! ...

Pues tengo el gusto, señor De Arco, de darle calabazas. ... Tengo la satisfacción imensamente de darle calabazas. ... Tengo el orgullo de negarme a ser su mujer. ... Entiende usted? Me niego a ser su mujer.ī?

Although De Arco needs to be loved and cared for as much as Alicia needs someone to love, in the end she is humiliated by this emotional crisis with which she fails to cope. After her failure she will continue to live in the past, bound by habit, by sloth, and by a persistent dislike for the thought of tomorrow. "El noviazgo," although an especially well written novelette, shows scant resemblance either to the technique of Hada and La isla y los demonios or to that of the other stories which make up the same collection.

īTbid., pp. 138-139. actics, p. 139.
The last novelette of La llamada is "El piano," the rather simple, generally unpretentious story of a young couple living with their five-year-old son in a water-stained barracks apartment shortly after the termination of the Spanish Civil War. Their involvement with a piano which is left to them as an inheritance is the underlying theme and provides the title. Rosa, her husband, Rafael, and the son, Pablo, are poor; the description of their poverty is typically tremendista. The following picture of their street sets the tone:

La luz cegaba los ojos al rebotar en el cemento y la cal de las fachadas, en el asfalto polvoriento, que se resquebrajaba por algunos sitios, dando una impresión miserable. Se echaba de menos el canto de las chicharras en aquella pequeña calle de la ciudad, que ya estaba cerca del campo. Todas acera estaba bardeada por la tapia de un solar, sobre el que gravitaba un cielo deslumbrante, casi negro. En la otra acera, un monstruoso bloque de viviendas baratas recibía aquel baño de calor y sus infinitas ventanas llameaban.\(^\text{13}\)

In spite of desolate economic straits, Rosa, the protagonist, seems untouched and undaunted by her environment and, unlike most of Laforet’s characters, is obviously a happy person. An orphan, she has spent her childhood under the guardianship of a wealthy aunt, Dofia Micaela, who is still alive and whom she occasionally visits. Dofia Micaela demands little of Rosa other than that she play the piano. The latter, however, refuses

\(^{13}\text{Ibid.}, p. 193.\)
to sacrifice her own personal independence by prolonging her visits to satisfy the old woman's whim.

Galen salió de aquellas visitas con un sueño tremendo era la propia casa. Pero reflexionaba que, en verdad, las cosas interesadas se pagan siempre, y que buscaba el interés de un chocolate y unos bollos reparatorios de sus energías en la visita a la tía Micaela. Se esperaba de pensar, a veces, que algunas personas, en su caso, habrían sido capaces de perder en unos ratos, de cuando en cuando, sino lo más hermoso de la vida, la juventud, la alegría, para recibir a su debido tiempo aquellos muebles tan apreciados por doña Micaela, la plata de los aparadores, la porcelana de las vitrinas y la renta que sostenia esta casa con criados y con lustre.14

When Micaela dies, the only thing she leaves Rosa is ironically the elegant piano that the latter has stubbornly refused to play.

Rosa is thin and rather ugly, yet these shortcomings, like that of her poverty, do not dismay her. Bright and energetic, she clearly displays a mind of her own. Her constant smile and expression of contentment cause no end of gossiping on the part of her malicious neighbors:

Porque, en verdad, lo que la calle entera encontraba insufrible en la señorita Rosa era aquel aire de felicidad perpetua, aquella especie de reto de su sonrisa, como si fuera distinta de todas, como si a ella no le pesara la miseria, ni el dolor, ni la angustia...15

The neighbors' interest in Rosa becomes even keener because she dares to smoke in public.

14 Ibid., p. 215.  
15 Ibid., p. 198.
Rafael, the husband, is more nearly a tremendista character than his wife, but he lacks the force of evil which normally pervades the type in question. Having aspired, above all, to become a successful writer, he has found, since his first publication, that others consider his talent too slight to be taken seriously. Unable to succeed in any literary endeavor, he has more or less resigned himself to work at a simple job. His soul is tormented, however, because of his artistic failure and economic difficulties. Having expected to inherit a large amount of money and property from Micaela, he is all but emotionally unhinged upon learning that the only thing bequeathed by her to his family is the piano.

Although "El piano" is less idealistic in tone than "El último verano," there is still little, if any, of the withering hatred or heartsick despondency found in the preceding novels of Laforet. One might say, in fact, that it is neither shocking, unusually stimulating, nor even very interesting, but borders instead upon triviality. Its ending, however, seems more reasonable and clearly motivated than most of Laforet's denouements.

It has been shown that in the four novelettes of the collection, emphasis is placed alternately on plot and on characterization. In the latter case the results
are merely brief sketches which strive to catch a mood or depict a character. Their quality is uneven; the best are good; the weakest do not rise above the level of average fiction. It is quite evident, however, that Carmen Laferrère has begun to replace the desolation and grotesqueries of her earlier books with more wholesome tales of personal hardship overcome by strength of character.
CHAPTER V

LA MUJER NUEVA

Carmen Leforet's latest book, _La mujer nueva_, is her most ambitious literary endeavor to date, and for it she has already won vibrant notices. A rather lengthy novel, it is deeply involved with religion, being the story of its heroine's conversion to Catholicism. Important autobiographical elements are present, since the author herself had recently become a Catholic convert at the time of writing it. In this regard she frankly states:

El hecho humano que motivó la temática de esta novela fué mi propia conversión (en diciembre de 1951) a la fe católica. ... Fe que podría suponerse que me era natural, pues fui bautizada al nacer, pero de la que jamás me volví a preocupar después de salir de la infancia, y cuyas prácticas—para mí enmohecidas y sin sentido—había dejado totalmente.¹

Unfortunately, Leforet is only partially successful in her attempt to use her own religious experience as a basis for a novel, since _La mujer nueva_ proves to be a much weaker work than _Nada_, or even, _La isla y los demonios_. Torrente Ballester says of it:

Ultimamente ha escrito la novela, novela que ha alcanzado el premio literario más cuantioso de los que actualmente se disciernen en España. Se cuenta en ella la conversión religiosa de una mujer, casada y adúltera. El esfuerzo de la conversión parte la novela en dos mitades muy distintas de su calidad. Nos parece que la primera es superior a la segunda por la autenticidad del material y por el modo de estar contada. Falla la segunda por la composición, como si faltando elementos para su normal desarrollo, para su desenvolvimiento orgánico, se estirase sus dimensiones mediante una integración de material adjectivo que, por cierto, tiene un valor independiente pero que estorba a la unidad de la novela. Sobra también, en esta segunda parte, el tono apologetico.  

An analysis of the novel reveals little which might be called tremendismo. The protagonist is thirty-three-year-old Paulina Nives, a rather unstable woman inclined toward agnosticism. As the action begins, she is preparing to leave her husband, Eulogio, in the imaginary provincial town of Villa de Robre and take a train to Madrid. Through a series of illuminating flashbacks, Lefort traces some fifteen years of Paulina's life from her adolescence in Madrid to the marital difficulties that cause her departure. The flashbacks, however, bring Paulina abruptly back to the present and simply drop her there. 

It is seen that throughout her life Paulina has attempted to pursue her own hard and lonely path to

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2Eduardo Ballester, Panorama de la literatura española contemporánea (Madrid, 1956), p. 452.
the truth. Among her traits is a staunch anticlericalism which has developed largely as a reaction against the hypocrisy of her coarse, brutal father and her weak, slovenly mother:

Paulina fue creciendo con la idea obsesiva de ser absolutamente lo contrario de lo que habían sido sus padres. No le gustaba ser llorona, triste, vestida sin gracia, como su madre; espantarse de cualquier cosa que leyese o la contase, como se espantaba ella, a quien, sin embargo, en la realidad ocurrían cosas verdaderamente crudas y serias; pasarse el día haciendo cuentas y pensando en el precio de lomotes y judías al por mayor. Turcir, entre golpes de tos, enormes pilas de ropa vieja ... y asarse los domingos en la cocina para preparar una comida que los invitados tenían que alabar muchas veces y repetir constantemente, para que ella pudiese sentir la única satisfacción de la semana ... A la imagen de su madre, Paulina oponía la de la señor Mives, la mujer del dueño de la fábrica de quesos y montequilla, a quien llamaban «la extranjera». Era alta, rubia, sabia muchas cosas. Cuando Paulina vivía en Madrid mucho más ya que en Villa de Bobe, se daba cuenta de que Mariana vestía muy bien. Una vez al año, los Mives hacían un viaje al extranjero. ... Mariana Mives era una especie de ídolo de Paulina en aquellos tiempos lejanos de su adolescencia.

Pero, sobre todo, esto sobre todo: Paulina no quería parecerse a aquel hombre de gustos groseros que era su padre. Le desesperaba su hipocresía y su vanidad. Le afeían que demostrase de ser tenido por bueno, los trémulos en la voz, que a veces le salían al contar una historia edificante, su asistencia a la iglesia, que no le servía para dejar de ser un puerco y el que la obligase a ella a asistir, mientras no permitía que ni Paulina ni su madre viesen— porque no era a propósito para mujeres decentes — cualquiera de los espectáculos que llegaban al pueblo en verano, y en cambio él
no dejase de estor en primeras lineas cortejando a las artistas.  

After finishing her university studies in Madrid, Paulina has met and fallen desperately in love with Bulogio Hives, the viril, wealthy son of a distinguished family of Villa de Robre. At the outbreak of the Civil War, the two have gone to Barcelona to be married in a military ceremony. Since the marriage was not recorded, it has, of course, no legal validity. Just before the fall of Barcelona Bulogio, for some unexplained reason, has deserted his pregnant wife and departed for America, spending there some nine obscure years. Meanwhile, Paulina has given birth in prison to a son, Miguel; and there also she has accidentally met Bulogio's cousin, Antonio Hives, who comforted her faithfully and at times, emotionally.

Paulina's dreary, difficult postwar years have been spent in Madrid, and she has become thoroughly capable of looking out for herself and her young son. Then, as inexplicably as he departed, Bulogio has returned to her from America. Though their love has long since grown cold, Paulina has insisted upon fulfilling her marital duty and decided to return to Villa de Robre where, without attracting disgrace, she could live in loveless  

misery with her husband. A later meeting with Antonio has led to an adulterous relationship with him in what seems to be on Paulina's part an effort to attain physical love without any of its customary complications.

The somewhat confusing flashbacks end and the melodramatic beginning of the novel is picked up again on the train to Madrid where Paulina expects to await the death of Antonio's wife, who is incurably ill with leukemia. Paulina feels that she has nothing but herself, and a sense of emptiness pervades her. Recognizing her own moral corruption, she is dismayed by her spiritual paralysis. Then strangely peace seems to fill her soul for the first time and by an internal illumination she is abruptly converted to Catholicism. Of this spontaneous happening, Alborg comments:

La conversión de Paulina es demasiado rápida y fácil. Bien está en la vida real este fulminante golpe de la Gracia, pero una novela exige más justificados motivos psicológicos. Sin ellos, la intervención de la Divinidad parece haberse convertido en un cómodo aliado del novelista. La Paulina pecadora es absolutamente convincente; la mujer nueva desambula frecuentemente un tanto desorientada, a pique de estrellarse en los escollos de la vulgaridad y el sentimentalismo. Parece además que algunos elementos—tipos y anécdotas—de esta segunda parte son apenas necesarios en la arquitectura de la novela y más bien semejan episodios de relleno con el fin de equilibrar las masas entre las dos mitades del libro.  

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Paulina's conversion marks the beginning of her painful journey toward spiritual redemption. For the next year her mood fluctuates between religious exuberance and melancholy depression as she tries to regiment her disorderly feelings. At one time she even seriously considers entering some religious order or, at least, dedicating herself to social work. At other times, although she still has decent impulses, she is unable to understand and follow them consistently or entirely resist temptation. Under a façade of respectability, she even goes so far as to spend an erotic, rapturous week with Antonio at a Mediterranean resort. By repeated shifts from signs of strength to signs of weakness, Laforet delineates clearly and subtly the struggle between the conflicting sides of Paulina's complex personality.

After her responsibility to her son causes others to discourage her in her plan to enter a religious order, she seems wholly satisfied to wait until the time Antonio will be able to join her. Quite by accident, however, she witnesses the church wedding of two elderly people. The spectacle convinces her that, if she wishes to serve God, she can best do so by returning to Bulogio and her son. Having failed to find happiness with Antonio, she seems to conclude that even an unhappy marriage offers a chance for spiritual growth. Adamently
she refuses to wait any longer for her illicit lover and, as the novel terminates, is preparing to return to life with Bultogio. The latter who has apparently never demanded of her even traditional domestic fidelity, seems only glumly reconciled to make the best of a bad marital bargain. As in Laforet's previous novels, the conclusion is abrupt, implausible, and rather confusing.

Almost no evidence of tremendismo is to be found at all in the latter two thirds of the book, there being little room for it among the lengthy discussions of religious concepts and descriptions of religious sentiment and ritual. The seamier side of human existence, and such feelings as anguish and despair, seem far indeed from Laforet's mind. The first third of the story, which lays the foundation for Paulina's conversion, though by no means an entirely rosy picture, deals to a great extent with her adolescence and thus is also a vehicle rather poorly suited to tremendista techniques.

The youthful Paulina of La mujer nueva resembles in various ways the characters Andrea of Nada and Marta of La isla y los demonios. Alborg says of this similarity:

Paulina, la heroína, sigue estando en la línea de Andrea y de Marta, pero, convertida ya en fruto logrado de mujer, la encontramos ahora, durante la primera mitad del libro, enredada en la aventura de sus amores que son intensos y dramáticos. Hembra aline, independiente, apasionada y capaz de apasionar, esta Paulina puede considerarse asimismo como el tercer capítulo de la vida de
una misma mujer; y, si no en los detalles anecdóticos, en el espíritu al menos parece que continúa siendo la proyección de la personalidad de la escritora. 5

Like Leforet's earlier heroines, Paulina too displays independence and courage in her attempt to dissociate herself from a crude, possessive, and incompatible family:

Se callaba. Le daba vergüenza decirle a Víctor que su padre blasfemaba como un carretero, que tenía un genio del demonio, que, a pesar de su carrera y de presumir de señor, era grosero con su madre, a la que había llegado a golpear cuando la hacía reproches por culpos. Le daba más vergüenza que lo de las amigas. . . . No le dijo que la criada de la casa, una tal Leonela, era la querida de su padre desde que llegaron a Villa de Sobr, y que su madre jamás había podido despedirla. Muchas cosas Paulina nunca pudo decírselas a Víctor. No le dijo, por ejemplo, el sufrimiento que había sentido en las noches de sus cinco años, despertándose en la oscuridad de su cuarto porque su padre insultaba a su madre, que lloraba en la habitación al lado. No le explicó cómo se ponía ella de rodillas en su casa, rezando a Dios para que los padres se reconcilian y fuesen buenos y hubiese alegría en casa para siempre jamás. 6

While the two previous novels ended with their heroines' escape to a more wholesome environment, Paulina goes on to marry Mulágu, soon discovering that marriage does not solve her problems entirely. Her married life is blissful at times and the Spanish Civil War seems

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5 Ibid., p. 133.
6 Carmen Leforet, La mujer nueva (Barcelona, 1955), p. 43.
Llegaron a los momentos peores de la guerra, y sin embargo parecía como si en la casa de las señoritas Martí ni siquiera hubiese comenzado el siglo veinte. Por una paradoja, Paulina siempre recordaría los años pasados allí como un remanso pacífico. ... Parecía que las sirenas y los bombardeos y el lejano tabletear de las ametralladoras pertenecían a otro mundo. Paulina, el recordar su vida, nunca pudo asociar imágenes de guerra con aquella casita de dos pisos, muy estrecha con un jardincito minúsculo, donde crecían dos o tres plantas polvoriento.s.  

Shortly afterward, without provocation, Falangist desert his wife and escapes to America during the closing months of the war. Though insufficiently explained and therefore unconvincing, his desertion and nine-year absence provide Laforet ample opportunity to portray her heroine against the familiar background of decadent conditions prevalent in postwar Spain. At that point the influence of the tremendista school becomes clearly, if briefly, evident. The following passage is typical:  

La casa de Amalia era obscuro, húmeda y triste—un piso bajo en un caserón del Madrid viejo—, un lugar muy poco a propósito para un niño como Miguel. ... Las bombillas de aquella casa eran siempre demasiado flojas, y a veces los huéspedes se tropezaban como espectros en los complicados pasillos, pero a pesar de todas estas cosas, Paulina había vivido allí cinco o seis años, no sólo porque el precio de la pensión era irrisorio, sino simplemente porque Amalia lo ofreció la mujer más agradable y optimista que había encontrado después de la helatóna de la guerra. Sí, Amalia,

7Ibid., p. 81.
sólo con sonreírle, le había espongjado el corazón. Porque Paulina, insensiblemente, se había ido habi-
tuando a la aspereza de aquellos tiempos en que las gentes no pedían disculpas, sino que se mira-
ban con rabia al tropezarse por las calles. Aquella
época en que se veía a muchos hombres y a muchas
mujeres gesticulando solos, hablando solos en las
aceras, y las conversaciones en los tranvías, en
el «Metro», en los parques públicos era obsesión-
antes conversaciones sobre comida, ... Conversa-
ciones llenas de ansia, conversaciones de lobos
hambrientos.8

As it has been previously stated, in the latter
two thirds of the novel almost everything is subordinated
to descriptions of Paulina's religious experiences.
Laforet turns her central character into little more
than a symbol, attributing to her at times a saintliness
difficult to reconcile with other manifestations of
her puzzling character. Lengthy passages, like the
following, frequently tend more to choke the narrative
than to shed real light upon the heroine's psychological
make-up:

Jamás Paulina, hasta entonces, había entendido
el Cielo. No cierto, tampoco se lo había querido
imaginar, y las pueriles palabras con que se lo
habían explicado los hombres le habían causado
risa, y le habían producido imágenes absurdas, ... 
(«Angelitos tocando el arpa», «quietud». ... Y le
pareció que si alguna vez ella intentase expli-
carlo, su explicación sería también pueril y
limitada. Como si alguien quisiese dar idea del
color y la luz a un cielo de nacimiento, así sería
su explicación para quien no lo hubiese entendido
antes. Pero ella se empañaba de la misteriosa y
da vez tranquila y arrebataba comprensión de la
hoguera de gozo a que, maravillosamente, el hombre

8Ibid., p. 158.
To summarize this analysis of the book, time throughout it tends to move slowly, actions are rare, and emotions are muted. The heroine appears either smothered in doubts and fears or inextricably caught in a web of self-deception. She does not exhibit, however, the same emotional frustration shared by Andrea and Hara of Hada and La isla y los acianios, respectively. La mujer nueva, the last book so far published by Carmen Laforet, clearly displays less tremendista influence than any of her previous volumes. Sáinz de Robles suggests the following explanation, which, of course, can only be considered a partial one: "En esta última novela se advierte demasiado la sumisión de la autora a las exigencias del concurso en que fue premiada." 10

9 Ibid., p. 102.

10 Federico Sáinz de Robles, La novela española en el siglo XX (Madrid, 1957), p. 264.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Although the writings of Carmen Laforet have been limited in number, they have unquestionably a strong popular appeal resulting from her unusual faculty for sensing and transmitting the doubts and yearnings of a postwar Spanish generation with few illusions and, until the appearance of Laforet and Cela, without a voice. Master of a narrative art sometimes charged with ever-threatening catastrophe and at others sad and elegiac, she is enabled to hold her public's interest by an extraordinary insight into human nature and motivation and by a true genius for making the reader forget that any world exists except the one depicted in the novel.

As regards characterization, she has placed particular emphasis upon the development of female protagonists and has demonstrated a rare talent for portrayal of feminine personality. Her characteristic manner of presentation of her heroines involves isolating them under a kind of intense spotlight beneath which they stand out sharply against contrastingly sordid
backgrounds. One might say that, as a result, these individuals seem not only to shine but also cast a shadow over their surroundings. The sordid background to which reference is made consists of a Spanish society of the periods during and immediately after the civil war of 1936-1939. It should also be pointed out that events of the war themselves play only a minor role, yet indirectly they are the causes of conditions which make up what might be called the typical tremendisto atmosphere.

*La isla y los demonios* takes place during the closing months of the war. Due to the fact that the action in the novel occurs a considerable distance from the mainland, however, it seems entirely isolated from the conflict itself. Paulina and Bulogio, of *La mujer nueva*, marry during the early months of the war, but they manage somehow to live rather tranquil, carefree lives in Barcelona.

*Laforcat* is seemingly undisturbed by social or political injustices in general, perhaps a fortunate circumstance since expression of interest in such matters would probably have led to censorship by the Franco regime.

Although tremendismo did not produce any technical innovations, it did succeed in making *desear* a popular
literary theme. Carmen Laforet's first two novels, Nada and La isla y los demonios, thus clearly exemplify the movement's principal characteristic. With the exception of the heroines of both books, virtually all characters are abnormal, and in each is to be found a grim inner world of despondency and fear. The depths contemplated in each are inexhaustible profundities of human cruelty and guilt. Laforet almost seems to take sadistic pleasure in the complex atmosphere of tension surrounding her two beleaguered heroines. The relentless, bizarre trials each faces are recounted with grimly detailed, laconic realism. Laforet also almost appears to take pleasure in arranging the ruin of the mordant secondary characters whose lives may be said to oscillate between feverish madness and tiresome mediocrity.

Laforet's alignment with tremendismo becomes progressively less direct and less powerful in the course of her career. In La llamada, emphasis is still occasionally placed on abnormal characterizations, but the work is a transitional one in which there is also found the budding of an idealistic philosophy. In the short novels which it contains, characters, sometimes through personal fortitude and sometimes through religion, find strength enough to overcome their personal destitution.
and survive to discover values which sustain them and give focus and direction to their lives.

Laforet's idealistic tendencies are developed to a still higher degree in La mujer mueva, a work in which the principles of tremendismo are all but entirely abandoned. The heroine, Paulina, does not find herself in constant contact with depraved, terrified, and at the same time, boresome individuals unable to cope with mundane practicalities; she does not have to face the daily frustrations and miseries of economic destitution; nor does she live each day in constant fear of oppression by relatives or friends. Confronted with more normal problems of life, she at times seems almost oblivious to the possibility of evil in anyone. Afraid of life only because of a lack of love, she wears a mask of pettishness, spitefulness and reserve to conceal her inner anguish and loneliness, speaking her mind brilliantly but rarely opening her heart. In solitude, she tries to perfect her self-reliance so that any eventual happiness which may come to her will depend on no one else.

In the period in which the three novels and the collection of four novelettos were written, it is thus clear that tremendismo played a steadily diminishing role in Laforet's works. In Nada, La isla y los demonios,
and in parts of *La llamada* its influence is discernible in one way or another on almost every page; while in other parts of *La llamada* and in *La mujer muerta* it is scarcely to be noted anywhere. In view of this, a new significance seems to attach to the fact that Laforgue's earlier works have proved considerably more successful than her later ones.
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