



8-1970

A Comparison of the Heroines in Three Representative Novels of Concha Espina

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Recommended Citation

Dennis, Barbara Harris, "A Comparison of the Heroines in Three Representative Novels of Concha Espina." Master's Thesis, University of Tennessee, 1970.

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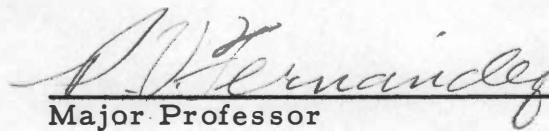
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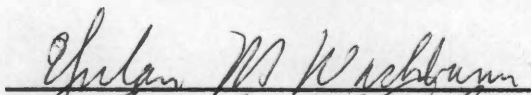
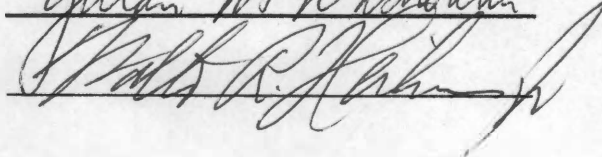
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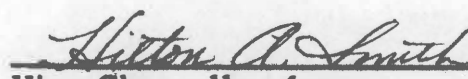
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Accepted for the Council:


Vice Chancellor for
Graduate Studies and Research

A COMPARISON OF THE HEROINES IN THREE REPRESENTATIVE
NOVELS OF CONCHA ESPINA

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Council of
The University of Tennessee

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Barbara Harris Dennis

August 1970

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with the utmost sincerity and affection that I wish to express my deepest appreciation to Dr. Pedro Villa Fernández, my most inspiring professor and friend, for his invaluable advice, constructive criticism, constant encouragement, and extreme patience in the preparation of this thesis. His words, "Adelante, siempre adelante," will always be remembered,

Much gratitude is also due my dear husband, whose generous moral support and affectionate understanding enabled me to devote myself so completely to this work.

BHD

ABSTRACT

It has been the intent of this study to present a closely-referenced comparison of the heroines of three representative novels by Concha Espina.

Through the use of developmental analyses and plot summaries of La esfinge maragata, El metal de los muertos and El Cáliz rojo, it has been possible to obtain a valid assessment of the similarities and contrasts found in the respective protagonists. In spite of the obvious differences in environmental, social and circumstantial elements, the three women evidence essentially the same basic personality traits, attitudes and reactions.

The personal tragedy in the lives of the three women and the anguish suffered by them result from similar sources. Each, yearning for a life of happiness, concentrates all her energy and attention on an illusorily ideal male figure, only to learn of his basic weakness; consequently, each is deprived of the much wanted life of love and happiness with him.

Regardless of the resultant disillusionment, the women remain spiritually faithful to their mistaken illusions. The unrealistic devotion exhibited by them in their romantic relationships constitutes their most extraordinary characteristic.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although Concha Espina Taglé (de la Serna) is not considered a major Spanish novelist, her literary efforts have enjoyed a warm reception in her own country as well as in most of Europe. The element that saves her works from mediocrity and which, in some cases, gives them a universal appeal, is the sense of humanity that pervades them. To discuss her novels without mentioning events of emotional effect in her own life is impossible, for the two are inseparable and mutually influential. It cannot be denied that the development of her principal novelistic characters constitutes a reflection of her own generous, kind and grieving soul. Espina herself expressed this personal belief when she wrote: "Lo más íntimo de un escritor sincero, lo más suyo y autobiográfico, está en las páginas de sus libros, donde seguramente pretendió hurtarse a la voracidad curiosa de los lectores" ¹

The first sixteen years of her life were spent in Santander, where she was born in April, 1877. Belonging to a large, wealthy, aristocratic, and religious family, she received all the niceties, affection and education enjoyed by her social class. Her literary inclination was recognized early by her understanding mother, whose love, attention and encouragement were invaluable to Concha during her youth. Being a sensitive, somewhat melancholy and pensive child, she spent much of her childhood alone, observing the beauty of her natural environment and hence turning into poetry her youthful impressions. Some of these

¹ Concha Espina, El príncipe del cantar (Toulouse: Editorial Figarola Maurin, 1929), p. 35.

poetic writings were printed in El Atlántico, a newspaper of Santander, even before Concha was thirteen years old.

Having lived a rather sheltered life until she was sixteen, she was not prepared to face the harsh realities of the outside world which she found confronting her after her mother's death. The following year was one of loneliness, sadness and confusion and resulted in her hasty marriage when she was barely seventeen years old. Although she entered this marriage with hopes of obtaining happiness, she was soon to become deeply disappointed and disillusioned. The three years that she spent with her husband in Chile--where they had moved immediately after their marriage and where she had given birth to two children--were the unhappiest and most difficult years in her life. Burdened with financial responsibilities after being deserted by her husband, she found herself alone with her children and compelled to provide a living for them. Because of these dire circumstances, she turned to her natural creative ability to save her; thus, after going to the editor of a small local newspaper in Valparaíso, El Porteño, she began her literary career by writing poetry and newspaper columns.

Upon returning to Spain, where she and her children lived with her father in Asturias, she continued her journalistic work and shortly after, in 1903, saw the publication of her first book, Mis flores, ". . . un tomo de versos infantiles."² Following the advice previously given to her by the editor of El Porteño, she changed the form of her writing from poetry to prose, a more popular and profitable literary field. After publishing her first full-length novel, La niña de Luzmela, in 1909, she dedicated herself vigorously and indefatigably to a literary career, producing some fifty books, consisting of small novels, short stories, essays, theater, poetry, and seventeen full-length novels.

²Ibid., p. 10.

Even the blindness which overcame her in her later years did not deter her creative production, for she published her last novel, Un libro de amor, in 1953, only two years before her death. The novel with which she gained literary fame was La esfinge maragata, which appeared in 1914 and for which she was awarded the Fastenrath prize by the Real Academia Española. Being one of her most popular works, it was translated into English, German and Russian. Two more of her works were also honored by the Real Academia Española: Tierras del Aquilón, a collection of short narratives, for which she received the Premio Castillo de Chiril in 1924; and El Jayón, a short story which was later adapted for the stage and for which she was granted the Premio Espinosa Cortina. Probably the most monetarily successful of her works and the one which has been classified as her masterpiece was the novel published in 1920, El metal de los muertos, one of her most sharply and accurately realistic efforts. It was translated into German, Russian and Swedish. Of all her works, however, regardless of the popularity of some, Espina has expressed her preference for three: ". . .dentro de lo posible, siento algunas predilecciones por La niña de Luzmela, La Rosa de los vientos [1916] y El Cáliz rojo [1923]; las he vivido más."³

Although the literary production of Concha Espina is extensive and written in a poetically meticulous, enriched style, it lacks variety and originality in theme, plot, character, attitude, and tone. While she excels in creating emotional intensity through her skillful manipulation of realistic descriptions of landscape and the vague, intangible feelings of her characters, she limits herself in scope to the study of feminine psychology. It is undeniable that her work is essentially feminine, for the principal characters are almost always women, especially in her novels:

³Ibid., p. 11.

. . . el eje alrededor del cual gira toda la acción es casi siempre una mujer, . . . que no ha logrado conseguir la felicidad en este valle de lágrimas, que tal es literalmente el mundo donde viven las mujeres de Concha Espina.⁴

The dominant recurring theme in the majority of her works has been concisely described by S. L. Millard Rosenberg: "la irrealización del ideal soñado, la insatisfacción del anhelo sentido y amorosamente acariciado."⁵ This leitmotif is specifically limited to the lives of her protagonists. In the Prólogo to a volume of her stories, Espina speaks about the lives of the women depicted therein:

. . . unas pobres vidas de mujer, humildes y atormentadas vidas, cuyo oscuro y resignado dolor tuvo en mi corazón ecos hondos. . . bellas y desventuradas criaturas que un día pasasteis junto a mí llorando y sonriendo, bajo la pesadumbre del destino! ¡Pobres vidas fugaces, rosas al viento, naves al mar!⁶

This pessimistic generalization about the unfortunate, helpless and grieving victims of fate is true of almost all the protagonists of her works.

It is the intent of this study to present a closely referenced comparison of the heroines in three of Concha Espina's novels: La esfinge maragata, El metal de los muertos and El Cáliz rojo. These novels, in addition to their being representative and popular, have been selected on the basis of their similarities in character, theme and attitude as well as basic contrasts in setting and the social classes of the principal characters. The study is specifically limited to an

⁴Juan Cano, "La mujer de la novela de Concha Espina," Hispania, XXII (February, 1939), 54.

⁵S. L. Millard Rosenberg, "Concha Espina," Hispania, X (February, 1927), 324.

⁶Concha Espina, Ruecas de marfil (Madrid: Pueyo, 1919), p. 6.

internal examination of the works. Chapter II presents a progressive analysis of La esfinge maragata with special emphasis on the main characters and their resultant actions. Chapters III and IV deal, respectively, with El metal de los muertos and El Cáliz rojo in the same way. In Chapter V a comparison is made of the similarities found in these works.

CHAPTER II

LA ESFINGE MARAGATA

La esfinge maragata presents a double tragedy, sociological and psychological. The scope of the novel offers an intensive view of the barren, sterile and oppressive land of Maragatería, and its tragic effect on the lives of the families, especially the women, who are compelled to toil in the unproductive fields for some manner of bare existence. Depicted within this somber atmosphere are the conflicts and the sacrifices of the sensitive, compassionate protagonist, Mariflor Salvadores: her struggle for personal happiness, her self-denial for the salvation of her relatives, and her fatalistic resignation to life in this region.

The first pages of the novel introduce the contrasting elements from which the later tragic conflicts develop. During the trip by train from La Coruña to Astorga the young romantic poet and novelist, Rogelio Terán, whose imagination is inspired by the beauty of Mariflor, makes some valid conclusions about the lives of Mariflor and her grandmother.

Los tres viajeros se miran de hito en hito, con vago asombro de las dos señoras e interés creciente por parte de Terán, que se lanza a la cumbre de las más arduas imaginaciones ante aquellas dos mujeres tan distintas, ataviadas de igual manera exótica, unidas por cercano parentesco, tal vez precipitadas por la suerte en idéntico destino . . . y, sin embargo, representan dos castas, dos épocas, dos civilizaciones. En un momento, la perspicaz observación del novelista sorprende, separa y define: la abuela es una tosca mujer del campo, una esclava del terruño; tiene el ademán sumiso y torpe, la expresión estólida, y en la tostada piel surcos y huellas de trabajo y dolor; diríase que la traen cautiva, que unos grillos feudales la oprimen y torturan, que viene del pasado, de la edad de las ciegas servidumbres, en tanto que la

moza, linda y elegante, acusa independencia y señorío, todo su porte bizarro lleva el distintivo moderno de la gracia y la cultura. En esta niña el traje campesino parece un disfraz caprichoso, mientras en la anciana tiene un aire de rudeza y humildad, como librea de esclavitud.¹

Tía Dolores, Mariflor's grandmother, is a good example of the typical maragata, resulting from the spiritually empty and physically exhausting existence of misery, slavery and submission to the unyielding demands of the land.

In order to understand the relationship that develops between Rogelio Terán and Mariflor Salvadores, it is necessary to discuss the elements of their backgrounds that have had psychological and emotional influences on their respective personalities. Rogelio is a sensitive and romantic dreamer, "un dilettante del amor,"² in search of new amorous experiences. He suffers from the memory of his beautiful mother's grief caused by his father's abandonment. Resulting from this obsession is Rogelio's idea: "No hay hermosura sin lástima."³ He is easily and strongly attracted to the beauty of any woman due to his illusion that behind every beautiful woman there is "un arcano de tristeza."⁴ Once emotionally involved in an affair, he is haunted by the fear of inheriting the irresponsibility of his father, who left his family during a period of financial failure. The personality traits exhibited by Rogelio in his life of illusions, therefore, are the product of his impressionable childhood years: his tenderness, compassion and sadness developing from his experiences with his mother, and his irresponsibility resulting from his impression of his father.

¹ Concha Espina, Obras completas (segunda edición; Madrid: Ediciones Fax, 1955), I, p. 241.

² Ibid., p. 242.

³ Ibid., p. 247.

⁴ Ibid., p. 242.

Rogelio's fantasy is poetically inspired by the beautiful and innocent picture that Mariflor presents while she is sleeping "el sueño de la hermosura"⁵ beside her grandmother on the train to Astorga. Rogelio is driven to become acquainted with Mariflor by his insatiable thirst for new sensations. The gentleness and the tenderness exhibited in his eloquent speeches facilitate this desired relationship.

The background of Mariflor and the circumstances forcing her to leave her home to live with her grandmother contribute to the development of her resultant emotional state. Florinda Salvadores, whom they call Mariflor, was born in her father's native village, Valdecruces, but she spent only a very short time there because her parents moved to La Coruña soon after her birth. The life enjoyed by Mariflor in that cultured coastal town was one of happiness, freedom, intellectual stimulation, and tender love and affection; thus, Mariflor developed into a sensitive, compassionate, intelligent and well-rounded person. Her mother's death, however, caused unfortunate circumstances. Within a year after this tragic event, Don Martín, Mariflor's father, having suffered financial failure, was forced to search for a living in Argentina and send Mariflor to live with his mother in Valdecruces. Mariflor became deeply saddened and sentimental, suffering the void of her mother's affection, and frightened by the uncertainty of her future life in the midst of unfamiliar people and a strange environment.

Being in such a state when she meets Rogelio, Mariflor is highly susceptible to his gentle words. Stimulated by the affectionate expressions and the attentiveness he exhibits, Mariflor eagerly and candidly answers his questions; she reveals her family background,

⁵ Ibid., p. 240.

the circumstances forcing her to leave her beloved home, and the consequential transitions in her life. The loneliness that she feels and the fear that she is silently experiencing, confronted now by an unknown future, are evidenced in her conversation with Rogelio. The changes that she has suffered since her mother's death are revealed when she tells Rogelio:

Todo me ha sido adverso desde entonces, . . . con ella se me fue la alegría, la fortuna y hasta el mar y la tierra que yo quiero; hasta el traje y el nombre que yo tuve.⁶

It is clear that Mariflor is truly grieved by the recent alterations in her life and frightened by the thought of being "empujada, inocente y pobre, al más duro y yermo solar del páramo legionense, a la tierra mísera y adusta."⁷ Nevertheless, she demonstrates the independence and the hope of a strong-willed person when she expresses her determination not to agree to the previously arranged marriage with her wealthy cousin, Antonio. Upon explaining that Antonio does not fulfill her ideal of a husband, she says: "No es mi ideal un comerciante."⁸

During the remainder of the trip, an innocent and affectionate relationship evolves from their conversations, which are filled with stories of adventure, illusions, desires, and evocations of romantic novels, which stir the emotions of these two seemingly kindred souls. Mariflor becomes infatuated with the uniqueness and the tenderness of Rogelio's thoughts, which fulfill her need for emotional relief and escape. Both the brevity of the time remaining to them before arriving at their destination and the rarity of their new relationship

⁶ Ibid., p. 243.

⁷ Ibid., p. 244.

⁸ Ibid., p. 245.

stimulate their emotions. The adventurous ambition of Rogelio to explore new souls and to experience new sensations drives him to make promises of future letters, verses, and even visits to his newly discovered friend, whose desire for happiness and affection receives hope from his vehement avowals.

Indirectly responsible for the conflict that develops in the sensitive character of Mariflor, and her resultant actions, is the poor land of Valdecruces, and its effect on the people who "exist" there. The desolation and the barrenness of the region are reflected in the character and the customs of the dull, backward inhabitants who are characterized by a complete lack of warm emotions, indifference, insensitivity and introvertedness. Their futile efforts to wrest sustenance from the unyielding land result in their conformity and fatal resignation to physical and spiritual suffering. It is within this atmosphere of despair, suffering and emotional coldness that Mariflor's inner struggle develops when she is forced to live with her relatives.

Concha Espina employs the following sentence in her description of Astorga: "¡Cuán desolada y yerta la ciudad magnífica y augusta!"⁹ The emotional impact that desolate, devastated and miserable surroundings can have on a person so keenly sensitive to things about her is evident. The initial impressions made by this oppressive environment on Mariflor, while she travels from the station at Astorga to Valdecruces with her grandmother, serve only to intensify her feelings of loneliness and apprehension. Outwardly calm and courageous, Mariflor silently experiences perplexing feelings of fatalism and an impatience for adventure.

The first brief encounter between Mariflor and her relatives in Valdecruces appears cordial, but it is evident that the genuine warm

⁹Ibid., p. 251.

affection to which Mariflor was accustomed is totally lacking. The relatives she meets the first night of her visit are Ramona, her aunt, and Olalla, her cousin. Her other cousins, Ramona's children--Marinela, Tomásín, and Pedro--are already asleep when Mariflor arrives.

The initial feelings of loneliness and insecurity that overwhelm Mariflor, immersed in an atmosphere of things and people totally unfamiliar to her, are slightly relieved the following day by the spark of friendliness that Olalla shows toward her. Olalla's amiable nature stimulates Mariflor's courage and inquisitiveness; ". . . se despierta con alegres ánimos a las realidades de la vida y quiere verlo todo, registrar su nuevo albergue, asomarse a Valdecruces."¹⁰

Subtle signs of the compassion and the responsibility that Mariflor feels toward her relatives are indicated in her reactions and her reflections during the first tour she makes of her new home. Typical of the omnipresent misery and ruin that she perceives in every detail of her surroundings is "la saluca,"¹¹ the epitome of the tragic metamorphosis from "riches to rags" that the family has suffered. Mariflor's sensitiveness responds with compassion to the ruined situation of her relatives; having observed every aspect of la saluca, Mariflor quickly reconstructs in her mind ". . . la dura cuesta de dolores por la cual los años, los hijos y la miseria torva del país, han derrumbado casa y heredad en torno a la abuela envejecida."¹² The conversations between Olalla and Mariflor reveal other factors which show the poverty and the physical hardships endured by the family. It is learned that

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 256.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 257.

¹² Ibid., p. 258.

there is a scarcity of nourishing food and that the women must do manual labor in the fields.

Although the first revelations concerning her relatives are depressing, Mariflor reacts to them with courage and optimism. After having been introduced to such elements, she experiences perplexing emotions during the few moments she has alone to meditate on the recent events.

. . . Sutilles emociones la turbaron; sobre la pobreza del paterno solar, la melancolía insondable del país y el oscuro misterio de las entrevistas existencias, la moza derramaba la ternura de su abundante corazón, con el firme propósito de amar y sufrir¹³

With her sympathy and compassion aroused, she altruistically resolves to love and to suffer for her relatives. Unfortunately, however, Mariflor deludes herself by thinking that her reward will be happiness through marriage to her recently discovered friend, Rogelio Terán. It is this illusion, this reasoning, this correspondence between Mariflor's goal of suffering for her relatives and her attainment of personal happiness, from which her ensuing emotional conflicts evolve.

Mariflor's inner turmoil follows a definite pattern of development, consisting of elements and events that compel her to confront the harsh realities of the life surrounding her and, consequently, to devote herself more firmly to the salvation of her relatives at the cost of her personal desires. There is a direct correlation between the degrees of awareness reached by Mariflor and the intensity of the inner struggle that she suffers: the greater the degree of awareness of reality that she reaches, the greater her inner suffering and emotional conflict.

Only one week after the meeting between Mariflor and Rogelio, she experiences the first full-scale conflict between her personal desire

¹³ Ibid., pp. 261-262.

and her duty to her relatives. One week of living with her relatives in an atmosphere totally unknown to her previously has sufficed for the sensitive and sagacious nature of Mariflor to become vaguely aware of the physical hardships and the emotional emptiness endured by them. In an effort to escape the bitter realities surrounding her, in moments when she feels insecure, she begins to dream of a modern Don Quijote, who "llegaría a libertarla."¹⁴ A partial answer to her dreams comes with the arrival of a letter from Rogelio. Her hopes for love and affection are strengthened by Rogelio's lyrical ideas of a most tender love, evoking" . . . aquel encuentro dichoso, aquella brusca separación."¹⁵ One of the ideas related by Rogelio, which becomes an integral part of Mariflor's fantasy, is that their friendship is not a new one, but rather the recovery of a lost love. Stimulated by this idea, Mariflor begins to imagine that Rogelio is the ideal for which she has been yearning all her life.

Shortly after entertaining the romantic thoughts inspired by Rogelio, Mariflor is confronted by a series of events and facts which momentarily shatter her, and bring her to a discouraging awareness of the misfortunes of her relatives. Recognizing their tragic, hopeless state, she envisions her misión redentora. At this stage, however, she perceives this mission on an idealistic level, without feeling the necessity of sacrificing her personal desires, unaware of the full extent of her mission.

The first opportunity Mariflor has to observe the actions of her relatives occurs during a family gathering, to which the young neighborhood priest, Don Miguel, has been invited. During this gathering Mariflor sadly notices the bitter, inconsiderate, unaffectionate nature

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 262.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 263.

of her aunt, Ramona, who constantly alludes to the family misfortune, and unmercifully scolds her children. The most pitiful victim of Ramona's sharp words is Marinela, an extremely pathetic young girl, who quietly suffers the spiritual, emotional, and physical tortures of her environment.

The compassion and the inquisitiveness of Mariflor are deeply stirred by the revelations resulting from this first family gathering. Extremely concerned, she is compelled to demand a full account from Olalla of the extent of the family's financial misfortune:

. . . Cuéntame: ¿es verdad que no tenemos con qué darle pan tierno a Marinela? ¿Es verdad que somos tan pobres como tu madre dice? ¿Que tendremos que acudir a labrar las aradas como las más infelices criaturas?¹⁶

After Olalla replies to Mariflor's questions, Mariflor realizes that she has come to Valdecruces "engañada."¹⁷ To make matters worse, Olalla, coldly and insensitively, alludes to Mariflor's duty to save her relatives by marrying her rich cousin Antonio, regardless of her own wishes:

. . . con la boda--dice Olalla, elocuente de pronto, lógica y persuasiva--la situación de la abuela podía mejorar, salvarse, y la nuestra lo mismo; saldríamos todos de este sofridero.¹⁸

Overwhelmed by Olalla's matter-of-factness and lack of concern for her personal feelings, Mariflor begs her to have compassion on her and not to forsake her. Yearning to aid her relatives, without sacrificing her personal desire of happiness, Mariflor promises: "Yo buscaré por otro lado la salvación de la hacienda, si de mí depende que la perdáis; quiero haceros mucho bien."¹⁹ When Olalla reveals her doubt and

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 266-267.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 267.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 268.

¹⁹ Ibid.

pessimism regarding the possibility of the family's salvation through another means besides Mariflor's marriage to Antonio, Mariflor goes one step farther by promising to perform a miracle. It is this self-imposed promise to which Mariflor becomes hopelessly bound.

Moments later, alone, reflecting on the most recent discoveries about all the misfortunes of her relatives, Mariflor perceives her mission:

. . . Exaltada por el nuevo sentimiento que albergaba en él [corazón], en aquella casa fuese el de redentora; imaginó que Dios ponía en sus frágiles manos el timón de la nave familiar, sin rumbo en la miseria del país.²⁰

Unfortunately, however, inspired by Rogelio's letter, she believes that her endeavor to aid her relatives will be rewarded by happiness, freedom and peace.

Already vaguely aware of the hard work and the suffering endured by the women of Valdecrucés, Mariflor confronts this harsh reality when she accompanies her grandmother to the fields that are being plowed for the summer crops. Carefully looking at the land about her, she notices the similarity that exists between it and her grandmother:

Ahora, en este paisaje sin contornos, llano y rudo, arisco y pobre, en esta senda parda y muda donde la tierra parece carne de mujer anciana; aquí, en la cumbre de esta meseta dura y grave, como altar de inmolaciones, tiene la vieja maragata aureolo de símbolo; su carne, estéril y cansada, también parece tierra, tierra de Castilla, triste y venerable, torturada y heroica.²¹

Observing a young woman, Felipa, who appears much older than she really is, Mariflor realizes the destructive effect that manual labor has on the youth and the beauty of the women of Maragatería. Returning home from the fields, Mariflor is informed by her grandmother of the

²⁰ Ibid., p. 269.

²¹ Ibid., p. 272.

accepted role of these women: to marry young, to stay at home working the land and giving birth to children while their husbands depart for other areas to try to make a living.

The priest of Valdecruces, Don Miguel, strongly influences the outcome of the novel because of the omniscient role he plays and the confidential relationship he establishes with Mariflor. Events in his life, prior to his position in Valdecruces, were responsible for his close connection with the Salvadores family and for his knowledge of the character of Rogelio. Having studied in Villanoble with one of Tía Dolores' sons, Don Miguel became acquainted with the family. Due to his former friendship with Tía Dolores' now deceased son, the young priest became attached to the Salvadores family as their friend and counselor when he took his position in Valdecruces. As "consejero y tutor de la familia Salvadores,"²² he is constantly informed of every misfortune and problem of the family. Apparently unlike the majority of the people of this village, Miguel--kind, gentle and compassionate--immediately inspires a certain amount of confidence in Mariflor. It is natural that Mariflor, in her moments of anxiety and despair, should seek advice and consolation from the understanding Miguel.

The first confidential interview between Don Miguel and Mariflor results from his need to find out her sincere feelings about the previously arranged marriage to her cousin, Antonio. Responsible for the necessity of this interview is the arrival of three letters which, although written by three different people, deal with the same subject: the proposed marriage of Florinda (Mariflor).

The letter from Don Martín, Mariflor's father, discloses his hope for her freedom to choose her own husband, although he realizes her marriage to Antonio would save the family. It reveals, also, the lack

²²Ibid., p. 276.

of success Don Martín is having in Argentina. Not wanting to deceive Antonio about Mariflor's present financial status, Don Martín requests Don Miguel to inform Antonio in order to find out if he will still want to marry her.

Antonio, occupied at that moment with his business in Valladolid, writes to Miguel expressing his eagerness to marry Mariflor in August, when he intends to visit Valdecruces, since this time would be convenient to his business schedule. Not knowing the exact plans of Mariflor, Antonio asks Miguel to give him a definite answer, el sí definitivo.

In the letter written by Rogelio, he alludes to the school days (nine years ago) when he and Miguel had known each other as students. It is evident that at that time they were very close friends, and, as such, Miguel had learned of Rogelio's romantic, visionary and irresponsible nature. Rogelio, aware of Miguel's probable memory of his fickle nature, expresses his good and sincere intentions regarding his affection for Mariflor, and requests Miguel to advise him about the development of the wedding plans and about his coming to visit Mariflor.

. . . ¿Quieres hablarme de estos propósitos? ¿Quieres decirme si dañaré los intereses de la muchacha yendo a solazarme con su presencia al amparo de tu amistad? Siento la violenta tentación de volverla a ver. ¿Con qué intenciones? . . . Yo mismo las ignoro en definitiva; desde luego, con las de hacerle todo el bien posible, y ni una sombra de mal siquiera. ²³

Having been informed of the needs and the desires expressed in these three letters, Miguel finds himself facing conflicting ideas concerning his responsibility as counselor and his ability to advise impartially; he is especially disturbed when he recalls the words of the poet's letter referring to his good intentions toward Mariflor. The welfare of the Salvadores family is of primary concern to Miguel. He

²³ Ibid., p. 277.

is fully aware of the financial gain and the rehabilitation that would result from the proposed marriage between Antonio and Mariflor. However, moved by the evocation of the romantic attachment that exists between Mariflor and Rogelio, he is forced by his conscience to find out the true sentiments of Mariflor about her cousin and Rogelio. Since Miguel knows of Rogelio's unstable and unrealistic nature, he reluctantly follows the path indicated by Mariflor's desire, which she expresses during their interview.

In order to answer fairly and truthfully these three letters, Miguel feels compelled to talk to Mariflor in order to learn her sincere sentiments. The strong will, the hope and the tender love and compassion exhibited by Mariflor motivate Don Miguel to take into consideration the dreams shared by Rogelio and Mariflor. When she explicitly states that she does not love her cousin for a husband, Miguel feels that the mutual affection and the illusions of the sweethearts should be given an opportunity to develop. Inspired by Mariflor's optimism and confidence in her cousin's goodness to help the family without forcing her to marry him, Miguel encourages her to continue having such faith. At one moment during the interview, seeming a little dubious about the possibility of Antonio's help, and remembering the miracle that she had promised to do, "con la ayuda de Dios, para librar la hacienda de la abuelita,"²⁴ Mariflor asks Don Miguel if he thinks a miracle is difficult. Although secretly doubting the possibility of such a miracle, one based on what Antonio would give the family after having been rejected by Mariflor, the compassionate priest answers: ". . . la fe mueve las montañas Para Dios no hay imposibles."²⁵ With these words,

²⁴ Ibid., p. 278.

²⁵ Ibid.

which give hope and confidence to the illusions of Mariflor, the first interview between the priest and Mariflor ends.

Within a short time, Rogelio, having received a letter from Miguel, arrives at Valdecruces with ideas of freeing his sweetheart. As he travels from Astorga to Valdecruces, the fantasy of this adventurer is disturbed by the oppressive environment about him. Attempting to escape its desolate reality, he vividly imagines its past ages and inhabitants. He perceives an opportunity to utilize his literary faculties "para abrir a las modernas corrientes de cultura y de piedad un ancho cauce y fundir en mieses de oro las entrañas estériles del páramo."²⁶

By the time Rogelio reaches Valdecruces, he has become so immersed in his illusions that he feels a strong impulse to liberate the entire "yermo."²⁷ However, feeling the enormity of such a task, he begins contemplating only the liberation of one woman, which becomes his sole purpose.

. . . Y, si aun este propósito fuese desmesurado para acometido por un corazón, un astro y una pluma, le quedaba al artista la certidumbre de poder esgrimir con gloria aquellas nobles armas, para rescatar del mar de tierra, libre y dichosa, a una sola mujer. A cada paso del mulo tomaba más cuerpo esta ilusión en los bizarros sentimientos del joven.²⁸

During the period of Rogelio's visit, which lasts for only two weeks, Mariflor's emotional conflict is intensified. With Rogelio near her, constantly stimulating and strengthening her desire for personal happiness, Mariflor experiences moments of great joy. Unfortunately, however, being generous and compassionate, she is unable to ignore or forget her misión redentora, since she is continually reminded of it by

²⁶ Ibid., p. 282.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 284.

²⁸ Ibid.

the unhappiness and the physical suffering that surround her in the home of her relatives.

The first words that Rogelio says to Mariflor when they are alone make an indelible impression on her. During the meal that same afternoon, in a dreamy state induced by her memory of his words, but surrounded by the glum and oppressive presence of her relatives, Mariflor silently infers:

Es a ella, a la triste criatura abandonada entre cuidados y pesadumbres a quien un hombre de calidad ha dicho esta tarde: ¡Te amo, te amo! Sueño llevarte en mis brazos, un día, lejos de Valdecruces; quiero compartir la vida contigo. ¡Eres mi reina, mi musa! ¿Me quieres, Mariflor?²⁹

Stirred by these sentiments, and observing the crudeness and the insensitive attitude of Tía Dolores, Ramona and "la Chosca," the maid, during the meal, Mariflor experiences momentarily a rebellious sentiment and a feeling of superiority. Aware of the difference that is evident in their character and manners, "descubre a estas mujeres Mariflor como a criaturas nunca vistas ni relacionadas con la sangre de ella, con su casta y origen."³⁰

Thus far, Mariflor has not been forced to show preference for either of her desires. It is apparent that she has believed that both goals could be achieved without the sacrifice of either. Although her illusions of personal happiness are strengthened by Rogelio's presence, she rejects his proposal of marriage--a proposal accelerated by his knowledge of the fact that she is living ". . . en sorda lucha pugnando heroicamente por favorecer a los suyos [parientes], sin hollar los fueros de su propio corazón."³¹ Evident in the rejection of this proposal

²⁹ Ibid., p. 291.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 292.

³¹ Ibid., p. 295.

is the power that the forces favoring the salvation of her relatives have over Mariflor. During a discussion between Mariflor and Rogelio, he asks her if she intends to help her relatives, even at the expense of her own happiness. Mariflor replies with the following ominous answer:

A costa de ella [la felicidad], no; pero antes de realizarla, sí. ¡Lo he jurado! Yo no puedo pensar en mi propia felicidad sin resolver la situación de esta casa. ¿Como? No lo sé. En Dios confío. Entretanto, debo olvidarme de mi misma.³²

In expressing this thought, placing priority on the welfare of her relatives, Mariflor provides a preview of the ensuing tragedy. It is evident that the responsibility she feels for her relatives is becoming a matter of conscience and honor, due to her promise to solve their grave problems.

Involved in this tragedy is the priest Don Miguel, whose advice, both to Mariflor and Rogelio, influences their actions. Informed by Rogelio of Mariflor's determination to help her relatives, placing conditions "a la propia ventura en beneficio de la ajena,"³³ Miguel envisions in the unselfish and compassionate soul of Mariflor a way to help the Salvadores family. He devotes his efforts, henceforth, to protect such intentions. His subtle endeavor to focus her attention toward a more lofty concept of happiness is seen in his conversation with her when she comes to him in search of comforting words and advice after realizing the fatal significance of her rejection of Rogelio's proposal. Instead of providing the needed encouragement and confidence she seeks, Miguel subtly implies his distrust in happiness and his doubt concerning Rogelio's ability to help her solve the family problems. He does indicate, however, his hope that Antonio could alleviate the

³² Ibid., p. 296.

³³ Ibid., p. 297.

critical situation. This unexpected, discouraging attitude that Miguel exhibits makes Mariflor feel forsaken by the one person whom she had trusted. Aware of the anguish and the confusion that she is presently suffering, Miguel attempts to be somewhat sympathetic and encouraging when he says,

. . . No te abandono, mujer. Te animo a ser valiente, a ver claro, a elegir el camino más corto para elegir al cielo, a desconfiar de la dicha que buscas en la tierra. ¡Pobre criatura! Debo prevenirte a ti que sueñas demasiado!³⁴

During the remainder of their interview, although firmly determined not to sell her heart for "un puñado de dinero"³⁵ by marrying her cousin, Mariflor begins to show signs of despair and doubt when she learns of the seemingly large amount of money necessary to pay the debts of her grandmother. Once optimistic about obtaining enough money to pay the debts, she now recognizes the unlikelihood of such a feat when Miguel informs her that the amount needed is "veintidós mil reales."³⁶ Although Mariflor tries to conceal her anxiety upon learning this, it is evident that she realizes the difficulty of fulfilling the mission of saving her relatives from such a critical situation and, consequently, the impossibility of achieving her personal desire of happiness.

After leaving Don Miguel, Mariflor seeks refuge in the garden of the Salvadores home. Concha Espina employs the following lines to describe metaphorically the pathetic state of despair in which Mariflor presently finds herself.

Atravesando el pecho de las más inefables compasiones, tomó Florinda el pétalo en sus manos, y con irresistible impulso, quiso volverle a la yema sonrosada, de donde había caído. Pero quedóse inerte, presa de inexorable zozobra: era imposible unir

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 299.

la hoja muerta con el retoño vivo. Y la zagala sentía como se deshojaba también, de inexorable modo, la palpitante rosa de su corazón.³⁷

Having seen a leaf fall from the stem of a rose, Mariflor feels that her heart is similarly being stripped of all hope for happiness.

At intervals during Rogelio's visit he has informative discussions with Don Miguel, who gives a detailed picture of the traits of the inhabitants of Valdecruces, their concept of love and marriage, their idea of woman's role in life, and other customs and attitudes. A concise, general description of this society is provided in the following words spoken by Miguel in a conversation with Rogelio:

. . . Aquí el alma es primitiva y simple; las costumbres se han estancado con la vida; ello es fruto del aislamiento, de la necesidad, de la pobreza: estamos aun en los tiempos medievales.³⁸

The typical marriages in this backward society are devoid of all romantic sentiment; they are made "con un poco de rutina y otro poco de interés."³⁹ A woman is expected to marry a man, not of her own choice, but one given to her through a pre-arranged family agreement. She knows only "la obligación de la esposa que debe concebir."⁴⁰ Deprived of the love and the affection usually associated with marriage, in order to fulfill this psychological and emotional need, she substitutes maternal love, which is her only source of happiness, and also the element that gives her the strength to endure the physical suffering encountered in the hard manual labor in the fields.

The men of Maragatería are forced by the poverty of the land to leave their homes and to migrate to other areas in search of work to

³⁷ Ibid., p. 302.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 312.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 311.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 310.

help support their families. They are morally good and faithful, but emotionally primitive and indifferent toward their wives. Explaining this attitude of the men, Miguel says,

. . . Si no saben sonreír a su esposa ni compadecerla tampoco saben engañarla ni pervertirla: no la tratan ni bien ni mal porque apenas la tratan. La toman para crear una familia, la sostienen con arreglo a su posición, y la reciedumbre de estas naturalezas inalterables descarga ciegamente todo el peso de su brusquedad sobre la pasiva condición de la mujer.⁴¹

While explaining and justifying in general terms these attitudes and customs, Don Miguel intermittently discusses the specific problem and role of Mariflor and, at the same time, attempts to persuade Rogelio to relinquish his intentions of liberating her in order that she might fulfill her mission. In answer to Rogelio's question, "¿Y juzgas que Florinda ha nacido para sacrificarse?"⁴² Miguel replies, "Florinda ha nacido para obrar el bien, pero con especial misión de bienhechora"⁴³ He proceeds to prescribe the best plan for Rogelio to aid Mariflor with her task by advising him: ". . . si la quieres salvar como tú dices, no interrumpas sus pasos hacia la más segura y definitiva de las salvaciones."⁴⁴

In the course of this particular conversation, Rogelio becomes deeply saddened. His depression results from Miguel's remarks disparaging his idealistic intentions and forcing him to perceive his inability to fulfill his hopes. He believes that Mariflor could never be happy, according to his romantic concept, living in such a backward

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 312.

⁴² Ibid., p. 310.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

place, destitute of warm emotions. He envisions the suffering and the sacrifice that she would be forced to endure there.

Attempting to make Rogelio believe that Mariflor's suffering would not be so great, Miguel explains that "el hacer bien mitiga el propio dolor, le cura, le recompensa. Quien más ama, con más brío se inmola."⁴⁵ Although she might be deprived of romantic love in a marriage with her cousin, she would not be robbed of all pleasures, considering the fact that eventually and inevitably she would be able to enjoy "el amor fortísimo de las madres."⁴⁶ Miguel ends his persuasive discourse about Mariflor's future by inferring that she will not be unhappy if she conforms to the accepted attitudes and customs of Maragatería. The philosophical concept on which Miguel bases this conclusion is: "Toda la felicidad del mundo consiste, a mi parecer, en eso: en conformarse."⁴⁷

Contrary to Rogelio's romantic, idealistic nature, Miguel finally persuades him to depart from Valdecruces for a short time in order that Mariflor may have a fair opportunity to devote herself to winning Antonio's help for her relatives, with or without a promise of marriage. The idea that succeeds in convincing Rogelio is that "la mujer es un ser misterioso nacido para amar y para sufrir."⁴⁸ It is evident that this idea evokes in Rogelio the memory of the boundless love and profound grief that his mother had suffered. Consequently, influenced by Miguel's persuasiveness, Rogelio agrees to inform Mariflor of the possibility that he might soon receive an urgent letter from Madrid, requiring him to leave for a while. However, as he vows to Miguel,

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 311.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 312.

"pero mi viaje no será una retirada, sino una tregua."⁴⁹

The day of Rogelio's proposed departure, hastened by the sudden arrival of Antonio, is a day of awakening, a day of disillusionment for everyone concerned. Going immediately to Miguel's house upon arriving at Valdecruces, Antonio is informed that Mariflor "ya no tenía dote."⁵⁰ He also learns from Miguel about the financial destitution and the miserable life that his relatives are suffering. Perceiving the implication made by Miguel in the following words, "y tú eres rico, y es menester que no las abandones, por caridad y por obligación,"⁵¹ Antonio--a proud, selfish and egocentric person--feels insulted and irritated by the fact that anyone should think he had such an obligation. Antonio's immediate reaction is to retract his marriage proposal since Mariflor is now without the wealth she had when the marital agreement was made.

Dreading the moment of Rogelio's departure and fearing the inevitable encounter with her cousin, Mariflor feels that "su suerte se decide sin duda en este día nublado y grave que pasa por Valdecruces tan sigiloso, tan descolorido."⁵² Already saddened by the thought of being separated from Rogelio, she is now forced to come face to face with her cousin. It is obvious that the uncertainty of Antonio's reactions toward her and her relatives makes her experience acute anxiety and apprehension. Nevertheless, upon learning of Antonio's arrival, she goes without delay to learn his intentions, and, thus, where her destiny lies.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 313.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 318.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., p. 317.

Concerning the relief of the uncertainty about Antonio's intentions to aid the family, this first encounter is fruitless for Mariflor. When she goes to see him at Miguel's house, the first thing she discovers is that Antonio, informed of her loss of dowry, has retracted his proposal of marriage. Although the fact that he no longer wants to marry her eases her tension, it is evident that this materialistic characteristic of Antonio is repugnant to Mariflor. Nevertheless, without fear of humbling herself, with the sole goal of aiding her relatives, she proceeds courageously and openly to persuade Antonio to lend his help to their rehabilitation. Observing Antonio's complete lack of emotion, his total unresponsiveness, Mariflor begins to feel that her effort is useless. At the moment when her hopelessness becomes visible, the first and only reaction is obtained from Antonio: "Pues hablaremos del asunto aquí el párroco y yo."⁵³ Immediately following this reaction, it is agreed that Antonio and Miguel will come to dinner that evening at Tía Dolores' house.

During this first meeting, although outwardly unimpressed and unresponsive to Mariflor's emotional pleas, Antonio is greatly impressed by the unusual qualities that he sees in her and her actions. Not having met her previously, it is obvious that the image that Antonio had envisioned was one of the typical passive woman of Maragatería. The disparity between this preconceived image and the reality of Mariflor is revealed in the thoughts that Antonio has while facing Mariflor:

. . . Nunca tuvo cerca de la suya una cara tan hermosa; jamás una voz parecida sonó tan suave y angelical en aquel oído de comerciante; ni el mozo suponía que en el mundo existiesen criaturas con tanta labia, tanto atractivo y tamaño corazón.⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid., p. 319.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Resulting from this impression is Antonio's later decision to revoke his previous retraction of his marriage proposal--a decision that is basically selfish and that later augments the conflict and the suffering of Mariflor.

This first encounter has a pathetically disillusioning effect on Rogelio and influences his decisions. At the moment of Antonio's arrival at Miguel's house, Rogelio, talking with the priest, is persuaded to hide in Miguel's bedroom in order that his presence will not jeopardize the hopes of the Salvadores family and, as Miguel explains, ". . . a enterarte . . . quizá te interese lo que oigas."⁵⁵ Hearing the entreaties that Mariflor makes to Antonio--an uncouth, insensitive person in the eyes of Rogelio's poetic vision--the romantic image of beauty and of perfection embodied in Mariflor is tarnished. Having seen her humble herself to someone so crude and selfish as Antonio makes Rogelio experience a feeling of humiliation, which he indicates in his words to Mariflor before departing from Valdecruces.

During their parting moments, Mariflor, innocent of the fact that Rogelio had heard her entire conversation with Antonio, informs him that "mi primo no me quiere porque no tengo dote, y ya no depende de mi boda el bienestar de mi familia."⁵⁶ When she asks if Miguel had told him, Rogelio replies: "Algo me ha dicho--balbució, añadiendo en su encono--: Tú no debías dirigir la palabra a ese hombre; eres demasiado humilde."⁵⁷ It is evident that in Rogelio's idealistic mind nothing justifies humbling oneself, regardless of the benefit that may be derived from such an action. However, a little ashamed of these last

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 318.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 320.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

disparaging remarks, Rogelio vehemently assures Mariflor of future poetic letters and of his eventual return when she is ready to go away with him.

The actions and the attitudes of Rogelio immediately preceding his departure manifest his weak character. In spite of Antonio's recent decision, which would have permitted Rogelio to remain in Valdecruces, he does not avail himself of the situation. On the contrary, he maintains the original thought that he is being forced from his love by the arrival of an unwanted suitor. It is evident that Rogelio is using Antonio's presence as a means of escape from the eventual state of being tied to one person, which would have been the inevitable result if he had remained in Valdecruces.

The conclusion, made by Don Miguel to himself while watching Rogelio depart, provides a concise summary of the pathetic character of Rogelio:

¿Pérfido? No; un iluso, un equivocado,
 Los poetas suelen ser como los niños: volubles y crueles.
 Juegan con las emociones sin miedo a destrozar un corazón,
 sea el propio, sea el ajeno, por una curiosidad, y, a veces,
 con el mejor propósito del mundo. Acaso los poetas entre todos
 los hombres, merecen más, por su condición infantil, las
 compasivas palabras: ¡Perdónalos, Señor, que no saben lo que
 hacen!⁵⁸

The event immediately following Rogelio's departure produces an emotionally agonizing experience for Mariflor. Impressed by the outstanding feminine qualities in Mariflor, her vitality and generosity, Antonio revokes his initial decision and promises to provide all the necessary aid for the Salvadores family. While discussing this decision with Miguel, Antonio asks the priest to intercede for him and explain whatever reason is necessary to convince Mariflor of his sincerity and that some misunderstanding had occurred regarding his first decision.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 322.

In an effort to persuade Miguel to do it, Antonio explains his ineptness in such matters by saying: ". . . y me pongo zarabeto y torpe en tratándose de finuras: quiero casarme con Mariflor; ayúdeme usted y me daré a buenas en lo de la abuelica."⁵⁹ Perceiving a slight chance to achieve the rehabilitation of the Salvadores family, Miguel agrees to Antonio's request.

The revelation of this decision to Mariflor and the ensuing reactions of her relatives result in a highly emotional scene, which becomes unbearable to her. Informed by Miguel of the new attitude adopted by Antonio when the two men visit the relatives, Mariflor goes straight to Antonio and says sadly, but categorically, in the presence of everyone: "Yo no te pedía nada para mí, y aunque me dieras todo el oro del mundo, no te puedo querer, ni ahora ni nunca."⁶⁰ The immediate reaction of Antonio to these resolute words, injurious to his manly pride, is to dismiss the matter completely, leaving his relatives in the hands of fate; however, the distressing cries and complaints of the three other women--Ramona, Olalla and Tía Dolores--motivate him to assume a more magnanimous attitude, hoping eventually to persuade Mariflor to change her mind. Beneath this newly assumed attitude of generosity is the protection of Antonio's pride, now threatened by "aquel señor 'de pluma."⁶¹ After learning of the extent of the pecuniary debts of Tía Dolores, Antonio firmly agrees to pay everything "si me caso con 'ella'; sois testigos."⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 326.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 327.

⁶² Ibid.

Of all the ensuing comments made, of happiness and relief on the part of Ramona, Olalla and Tía Dolores, the only one heard by Antonio is that of Mariflor: "Eso es imposible . . . ¡imposible!"⁶³ In answer, Antonio makes the following vow: "Yo no mendigo novia: pongo condiciones a la protección que se me pide; si no convienen, ¡salud! y que no se me diga una palabra más del trébuco de esta casa."⁶⁴ The agonizing effect on Mariflor, resulting from the inalterable resolution evidenced in Antonio's reply, is obvious.

The turmoil caused in Mariflor by Antonio's recent decision, providing her a definite way to save her relatives, is excruciating. At this moment, still clinging to her hope of attaining personal happiness with Rogelio, Mariflor is unable to accept the proposal of her cousin. Since the only means of alleviating the pecuniary destitution and the physical suffering of her relatives is coupled with this proposal of marriage, Mariflor finds herself incapable of resolving this problem and fulfilling her mission. Surrounded by the implacable, selfish cries of Ramona, Olalla and Tía Dolores, and faced with the firm determination of Antonio, Mariflor is forced to flee from the presence of these emotionally and psychologically devastating forces.

During the moments following Mariflor's sudden exit, Miguel manifests the disillusionment of his lofty intentions, concerning the noble self-denial of Mariflor for her relatives, and his regret for having participated in the emotional turmoil that has resulted for her. The indifference exhibited by the other women for the feelings of Mariflor and their selfish concern for personal gain force Miguel to see the tragic reality of the situation and of his influence on it. When the three women turn to him in search of a solution to their problem, he reveals his indignation in this decisive reply:

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Pues, ya lo estáis viendo: la muchacha no puede querer a su primo; el primo no quiere favoreceros a vosotros, y yo, ni puedo ni quiero sobornar los sentimientos de una doncella para hacer caridades a costa de perfidias.⁶⁵

Having witnessed the reactions of Mariflor during the last few moments, Miguel sees the destruction of his lofty dreams. When Mariflor came to Valdecruces, he had become fond of the hope that she would assume the burden of her relatives. Distrusting Rogelio's fickleness and his ability to effect happiness for Mariflor and her relatives, Miguel had thought that he could secure, at least, the rehabilitation of the Salvadores family at the expense of Mariflor's happiness. Knowing many secrets of divine consolation, he believed that she would eventually be recompensed for her sacrifice. The recent event, however, has destroyed his pious dream; he feels "una sensación de pavorosa caída desde las nubes a la tierra"⁶⁶ and realizes that he has been too idealistic about human strength. Upon hearing Olalla say that the reason for Mariflor's not loving Antonio is "por el otro,"⁶⁷ Miguel recognizes his greatest transgression on Mariflor's life: to have shared her romantic dreams, dependent upon an unstable person like Rogelio. Recalling the impatience and haste with which Rogelio departed, at the precise moment that Mariflor was free of her moral bonds, induces him to have pity on

. . . las humanas flaquezas y a dejar correr una benigna lástima sobre aquellos toscos espíritus asfixiados por el brutal peso de todas las ignorancias y todas las necesidades.⁶⁸

These events have a psychologically shattering effect on Mariflor and leave her deeply disturbed and confused. Realizing her dilemma

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 328.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

and the impossibility of fulfilling both of her goals, she falls into a period of inconsolable personal grief. Her only thoughts and worries are those concerning Rogelio and her love of him; she becomes totally oblivious to the suffering and the hardships of her relatives. This metamorphic phase of personal grief and unresponsiveness in the life of Mariflor is described in the following passage:

Transcurrieron en estas ansiedades muchos más días de los que Mariflor creyera posible resistir. Anduvo como una sonámbula viviendo en apariencia, desprendida con furioso egoísmo de cuanto no fuese anhelar noticias de su novio. El pan y el sueño le sabían a lágrimas, a ofensa el aire y el sol, y a intolerable esclavitud los lazos que la unían al hogar. Huyó de Marinela, que la llamaba siempre desde el lecho con una pregunta ardiente entre los labios, y procuró evadirse a toda intimidad, trabajando sola, en el huerto y la 'cortina,' convirtiéndose en hortelana, con indiferencia absurda, sin que la doliese el esfuerzo ni la dañase el calor. Apenas supo de Olalla y de su madre, que, laborando en la mies, aparecíanse en la cocina por la noche, mudas y hambrientas, estoicas, impasibles. La abuela, incapaz como nunca, gemía por los rincones con el corazón cansado de sufrir, y los niños tornaban de la escuela descalzos y maltrechos, sin que Florinda lo advirtiese.⁶⁹

The impatience she feels while desperately hoping and waiting for some word from Rogelio intensifies her anxiety and contributes to her tragic thoughts. Unable to admit to the possibility of being forgotten and abandoned by Rogelio, Mariflor begins to imagine a variety of fatal accidents that he might have encountered. Tormented by tragic thoughts concerning the fate of her sweetheart, she begins to feel an irresistible attraction to death and becomes physically and emotionally weakened.

This period of intense personal grief and outward unresponsiveness is suddenly broken by the arrival of a letter from Mariflor's father to the priest Miguel. "Mariflor despierta desde el infausto sueño de sus amores a las imponentes realidades de la vida."⁷⁰ Hoping that her

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 331.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 332.

father's letter will bring news of improvement, Mariflor goes immediately to see Miguel. Contrary to her hope, she learns of the worsened condition of her father's business matters. Overcome by the discouraging news and already weakened by her personal grief, Mariflor is unable to contain her emotion in the presence of Miguel.

Stirred by Mariflor's distress, Miguel attempts to console her and shift her thoughts from her personal troubles to the more critical ones of her relatives. His pious words, evoking the boundless love and compassion of God, have both a momentary effect and delayed influence on the thoughts and reactions of Mariflor. After subtly criticizing her recent despondency and forgetfulness of God's goodness, he exhorts her to have compassion for the poor, unfortunate people who are suffering so miserably about her. By the end of this conversation it is obvious that Miguel has aroused in Mariflor a sentiment of guilt for her recent period of selfish grief and, also, has stirred her generous, sensitive soul.

The frequent vacillations in Mariflor's reactions during this conversation reflect her deep inner torment. Upon hearing the pious words of Miguel, she outwardly evidences the desire to follow his advice. When he exhorts her to trust in God to help her to resolve the family problems, however, she reveals the existence of some doubt in even God's power to pay the enormous debts. The fact that Mariflor needs to grasp some word representing hope for her personal happiness is evident; she needs to ". . . asirse a un hilo de esperanza para poder vivir."⁷¹ The need she feels, however, is not for God, but for Rogelio. This is illustrated when she asks Miguel: "¿No sabe usted nada, nada de él [Rogelio], ni una palabra siquiera?"⁷² Upon hearing Miguel reply

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 335.

⁷² Ibid.

that he has not received any news from Rogelio, Mariflor resembles a deranged person, detached from reality. When she leaves Miguel, she is unresponsive to his words expressing the love and the need of her father, and the need of Marinela for her. She seems concerned only with her intimate sorrows, presently oblivious to the sorrows and the needs of others.

At this moment in Mariflor's life it is not clearly perceptible which of her sentiments will be stronger: the sympathy and compassion for the hardships of others, or the yearning for an impossible happiness. After returning home, she suddenly finds herself responsive to the suffering about her when she reacts compassionately to the sickly sighs of her cousin Marinela. The tender responsiveness exhibited by Mariflor toward her ill cousin illustrates the subtle influence of the recent words of Miguel and, also, the necessity she feels of escaping the grave personal grief she has been experiencing:

. . . Necesita poner las manos en el palpitante dolor, en la carne lacerada y febril; necesita escuchar llantos y gritos, sentir repugnancias y miedos, hasta ahogar las secretas desesperaciones en una borrachera de amarguras.⁷³

Mariflor obtains, in part, the needed escape by focusing her thoughts and emotions on the suffering of Marinela.

The complexity of the anguish felt by Mariflor is revealed in her moments of rationalization at the beginning of this charitable phase in her life. Unable to understand the reason for the misfortunes and the suffering that befell her in Valdecruces, she rationalizes that it is God's way of punishing her for selfish desires and for having rejected Him. She accuses herself of not having suffered enough, and of being selfishly unsympathetic to others. Repentant for such actions, she turns to God, hoping that He will reward her with His divine compassion. It is obvious

⁷³ Ibid., p. 336.

that the faith and the proposed charitable acts of Mariflor are motivated by her belief in the power of her self-sacrifice to resolve every problem. The author uses the following passage to describe this revitalized faith and hope of Mariflor, and the desired reward she hopes to receive:

. . . Florinda ha fijado los ojos en Dios con suprema esperanza; pretende conseguir del Cristo moribundo [Crucifijo], en memoria de su excelso martirio, una revocación de la sentencia que la confina en Valdecruces, sin amor y sin pan, bajo el cruel dilema de una boda repugnante o de una miseria definitiva y horrible.⁷⁴

During this charitable period in her life Mariflor dedicates herself to domestic chores, affectionate attention and care for Marinela, and physical labor in the fields. The kindness and the generosity exhibited in her domestic actions have a soothing effect on everyone, especially Marinela. In order to pay the doctor and to buy the medicine needed for her ill cousin, Mariflor sells almost all of her personal possessions. Although the majority of the personal items have a sentimental value, attached to some memory of her past happy life, she sacrifices them without regret.

After a short time it becomes apparent that Mariflor feels a lack of satisfaction and fulfillment for her charitable and sacrificial acts. Realizing that she is not completely free of selfish personal sentiments, as is illustrated in the strong sentimental attachment she feels toward the watch of her deceased mother, Mariflor decides that she must find another way to sacrifice and to suffer. This opportunity is provided by physical work in the fields. Noticing the tired appearance of her cousin Olalla, which shows great physical suffering, Mariflor regrets not having toiled in the fields like the other women of Valdecruces, ". . . y se dolía de no haber pagado su tributo de sudor a la mies."⁷⁵ She

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 337.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 340.

becomes determined to devote herself to this kind of physical torture.

The emotional state of Mariflor during this period is one of hypersensitivity. She is extremely responsive to the physical aspects of her environment and to the attitudes and actions of the people surrounding her. The contrast between her memories and illusions and the present painful reality, however, has a heartbreaking and humiliating effect on her. Memories of her past life are frequently stimulated by some object or action, as is illustrated by the first day she works in the fields with Olalla. The lessons that Olalla teaches her while they are working are disillusioning:

Recuerda Mariflor estas lecciones con profundo pesar: le sonaron un tiempo a dulcísima parábola llena de símbolos felices, y ahora le punzan la carne y el espíritu como anuncios de miseria y esclavitud.⁷⁶

Indications of the futility of Mariflor's efforts to become detached from her selfish desires and to be relieved of her suffering are evidenced in the hopelessness, the sadness, the loneliness, and the pessimism she begins to exhibit. By the middle of August, after a period of approximately six weeks, Mariflor ". . . apura silenciosa las crueles desesperanzas, dejándose caer en la mansedumbre secular de aquella vida que la va absorbiendo."⁷⁷ Although Mariflor believes that she is so different from the typical inhabitants of Valdecruces, it is clear that she is gradually becoming an integral part of this society in her involuntary acceptance of its stoical attitudes. The despair and the pessimism enveloping her are illustrated when she finds herself unable to pray during the religious part of the wedding ceremony of Ascención, the niece of Don Miguel.

. . . Quiso la joven rezarle con calor y confianza, como otras veces; pero un pesimismo envolvía sus pensamientos

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 346.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

en espesas nubes, y las mustias rosas de trapo, alzadas por el Señor con gesto desfallecido, le causaron infinitas ganas de llorar.⁷⁸

A few moments following this experience Mariflor openly reveals the existence of her tenacious love for Rogelio and her inability to sacrifice it for the welfare of her relatives. This occurs when she receives a letter from her father, requesting her to marry Antonio and assuring her that God will reward her sacrifice by making her happy. This supplication of Don Martín is motivated by the proposal of Antonio to aid his business ". . . con el capital necesario y bajo la condición de vuestra boda."⁷⁹ Embittered by the monetary element contained in her father's request, Mariflor tells Miguel: "¡Pero yo no me puedo vender!"⁸⁰ Replying to the assertion of Miguel that she is not obligated to sacrifice herself, Mariflor pathetically discloses the undeniable reality of her situation with these words: "¿Sacrificio? Mi condescendencia no sería virtud, ya que Rogelio me abandona."⁸¹

According to the philosophical ideas espoused by Miguel, Mariflor would be sacrificing herself by yielding to the wish of her father because, in the words of the priest, ". . . el que voluntariamente rinde su voluntad se sacrifica."⁸² Unfortunately, however, Mariflor is enslaved by her love for Rogelio and cannot voluntarily surrender herself to anyone else. This realization is revealed in the words spoken by Mariflor:

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 350.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 352.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

Es que no soy libre: lo juro, señor cura, que padezco una tremenda esclavitud Ya ve usted como 'se ha portado' [Rogelio] ; pues no importa: ¡le quiero, le quiero; no me puedo casar con otro! ¡Es imposible!⁸³

The anguish Mariflor suffers from the denial of her father's wish is apparent and contributes, in part, to the resultant psychological and emotional devastation of her character.

At this point in the novel three months elapse, from August to November. During this time the suffering of Mariflor and the oppressive atmosphere surrounding her have tragically affected her character. What she has experienced has been so intense that she begins to lose every desire to live and becomes attracted to the fleeting things in nature representative of death. It appears that she begins to realize that part of her personal suffering results from her hopeless love for Rogelio. Aware of this, she destroys the last material evidence of this love and hope when she tears up three letters from him. It is obvious that Mariflor believes that this action will help to free her from the torture resulting from this enslaving love. Regardless of this effort, however, the love and the hope for happiness still live within her.

The depressing desolation of winter, the suffering and the troubles of her relatives are the environmental elements contributing to the sadness, the loneliness and the pessimism engulfing Mariflor. Lacking the vitality and the sincerity characteristic of her first days in Valdecruces, Mariflor performs her duties and reacts in a mechanical, stoical fashion. This is shown in her reply to Marinela, who laments her own ill health: "Pues hay que tener ánimos--murmuró Florinda maquinalmente."⁸⁴

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 357.

Constantly surrounded by incessant cries and complaints, Mariflor begins to feel more intensely her conflict. She has a dream that illustrates this conflict between her growing sense of obligation toward her relatives and her rebellious sentiment against complete self-sacrifice.

. . . Oía la moza llorar, llorar mucho a la abuela, a las primas y a los rapaces: una voz, triste y oscura, clamaba también, entre condolida y furiosa. Mariflor quiso levantarse para saber el motivo de los llantos aquellos; pero la detuvo un aire de tempestad que soplaba desde sombría nube. ¿Volvían los huracanes de la nevasca? ¡Ah, no! Este viento y esta sombra eran pliegues alborotados en el manto de un cura. Don Miguel llegaba agitadísimo: '¿Oyes llorar?' preguntó. '¿Quieres tú ser el paño de todas esas lagrimas? ¿Di? ¿quieres?'⁸⁵

The illogical answer of Mariflor reveals that she is still enslaved to her love for Rogelio and, consequently, is unable to surrender herself; "En este corazón, todo llanuras y bosques y desiertos, ha nacido un amor."⁸⁶

Only moments after this dream of Mariflor, the priest Miguel visits her and delivers a letter which Rogelio had written to him two months before. Contained within this heartbreaking letter is the decisive element that forces Mariflor to surrender herself completely to her irrevocable fate in Valdecruces. The disillusioning confession made by Rogelio of ". . . mi pecado de inconstancia, mi estéril codicia de emociones, de ternuras y novedades . . ."⁸⁷ destroys all the romantic illusions and hopes for personal happiness that Mariflor had held. With all her dreams shattered, realizing the impossibility of her futile love and of fulfilling her personal desires, Mariflor calmly and stoically accepts the marriage to Antonio. This

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 361.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 362.

personally tragic concession of Mariflor reveals her capitulation to the rigid attitudes and customs of Maragatería, and the fulfillment of her obligations and duties to her relatives.

CHAPTER III

EL METAL DE LOS MUERTOS

El metal de los muertos is a realistic social novel that presents vividly the hardships and suffering of the impoverished people of a small mining town in Spain. The novel presents a large scale tragedy of the moral, physical and economic deterioration resulting in the lives of these inhabitants because of exploitation by foreign mine owners. Depicted within this atmosphere of desolation and impending doom is the love affair of the two principal characters, Gabriel and Aurora, two young people who are drawn together by the recognition of their similar interests and desires. Born illegitimately into the social and economic class of the underprivileged, they struggle to lift themselves from the miserable existence so typical of their class in an effort to obtain a life of love and happiness together.

The first pages of the novel present the puzzling character of Gabriel Suárez, a sensitive, humble and noble young man. He is introduced at a disturbing moment in his life when he is forced by failing business circumstances to leave his beloved coast in search of work in a mine. Facing an uncertain and depressing future, Gabriel finds himself stripped of everything meaningful to him. Regardless of the poverty in his life on the coast, it was what he loved and thus he is deeply saddened and somewhat embittered by the loss of it. After obtaining work in a mine, el Bosque, Gabriel reveals the fear he feels about his future life.

Pensaba Charol [Gabriel] con íntima zozobra en su nueva existencia. Allí mismo, al borde de la linde colorada, oprimida por la vegetación montaraz, dejaba su oficio que desde la niñez le envolvió en aromas salobres, en ímpetus audaces, en bravías independencias: hasta el nombre, arbitrario y rebelde, tenía que abandonar allí, bajo la disciplina de un

cautiverio desconocido, temeroso, amenazador. Así lo quería la suerte.

Sometióse el marinero con desconsolada tristeza.¹

The attraction that Gabriel feels toward the mines and his belief that he is drawn by fate to them cannot be explained at this point. Later, however, these two factors--the obsession of the constant attraction of the mines and the invincible power of fate--develop into salient aspects of Gabriel's character.

Aurora--a compassionate, sensitive and innocent young girl--is introduced at a sad and frightening moment in her life similar to that of Gabriel. She is forced to live with her mean and corrupt mother in Traspaña. Upon arriving at her mother's house, Aurora, apprehensively facing her future, reflects fleetingly over the impressionable years of her childhood that she had spent so miserably with her mother.

Se vio niña, sin padre, criada con despilfarro y hartura, dentro de una baja condición. En su hogar, frío y violento, había un lujo barato y escandaloso, con ribetes de íntima sordidez. Fue creciendo sin el refugio de un cariño bienhechor; jugaba sola; en la escuela y en la calle le volvían la espalda las chiquillas de su edad, y de continuo gravitaban sobre su frente alguna mirada severa, algún gesto desdeñoso. Un día de revelaciones y descubrimientos supo que su madre era una mujerzuela malviviente, y rasgó la penumbra de muchas cosas ignoradas. Poco a poco fue haciéndose melancólica y susceptible, y sin dejar los dinteles de la niñez, llegó a sentir vergüenza de su pan blanco y de su lecho esponjoso, al mismo tiempo que se creía alcanzada por la ancha sombra de un destino implacable.²

The influence on Aurora of these early years, when she was deprived of affection, is evidenced in her introverted and ultrasensitive nature. The logical future of a young girl from such a corrupt background as Aurora's is prevented by the fortunate intervention of some of her

¹ Concha Espina, El metal de los muertos (cuarta edición; Madrid: Compañía General de Artes Gráficas, 1920), p. 14.

² Ibid., pp. 15-16.

relatives who take her to live for a few years in Mexico. Within the stimulating environment afforded by the more cultural, intellectual and liberal society of Mexico, Aurora becomes more self-confident and happier. The strong will that develops in Aurora between the crucial years of twelve and eighteen is demonstrated in her determination to fulfill her own desire of remaining true to her ideals instead of marrying for money at the advice of her relatives.

At the age of eighteen Aurora is an enviable picture of young womanhood: gentle, intelligent, independent and idealistic. It is at this time that she is forced to return to her mother. This sudden transition destroys all hope for the continuation of the pleasant and peaceful life that she has enjoyed in Mexico where she had expected to escape a destiny of poverty, sin and corruption. The day of Aurora's return to the sordid, stifling environment is one of the blackest and most threatening moments in her life. It is the beginning of a cruel struggle for happiness, virtue and honor. She immediately becomes the topic of the most vicious and unfounded gossip and the target of her mother's evil attempts to corrupt and to exploit her goodness and beauty. The strength of Aurora's will and determination is illustrated by the perseverance she exhibits in her struggle to guard her personal pride and to keep her purity. Instead of sacrificing herself by becoming a prostitute, she shows a preference for the most menial of chores.

. . . Ella, criada como una señorita, sensible a las comodidades, propias de mujer, subió al monte a buscar gárabas y turba, fue a la acena con la macona de maíz, bajó al río como lavandera asalariada y laboró en los campos y en las mieses para conseguir un jornal.³

Frequently, when Aurora has finished her work, she takes a stroll along the wharf.

³ Ibid., p. 18.

The first day that Aurora goes to the wharf is a fortunate one, for at this time she meets Gabriel, who is to impart profound meaning to her life. The casual meeting is not only significant for Aurora, but is to affect dramatically the life of Gabriel. Both experience an immediate mutual attraction which develops into a tender, affectionate and trusting friendship. Each has an idealistic impression of the other. Aurora believes that she has found in Gabriel " . . . un hombre singular."⁴ And Gabriel feels that Aurora is the embodiment of perfection.

During the following frequent meetings the similarities discovered in their lives add new meaning and depth to their relationship. Of principal importance is their illegitimacy and the lack of care and parental affection in their early childhood years.

. . . Sus dos historias tenían puntos de contacto indisoluble, extremos que caían en una misma órbita de fatalidad; la mancha del origen había sido una indomable sombra de su niñez, que les seguía cubriendo con un manto de abandono y de infamia, y para más tortura, en ambos la inteligencia y el sentimiento poseían una alta filiación espiritual, iluminada por atisbos audaces, bajo el impulso de raras inquietudes.⁵

The inspiration and adoration felt by each, as a result of the revelation of their hardships and suffering, is evident.

Gabriel dio por segura la pureza de aquella moza tan valiente, sostenida con acérrimo empuje contra las maquinaciones del vicio, y ella supo con lástima y blandura toda la vida de él, bravía y miserable en los primeros años, amparada luego por una mujer pobre, triste y buena, que al morir volvió a dejarle solo frente al mar, hambriento de ternuras, extraño a sus camaradas por diferencias radicales de comprensión.⁶

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

⁶ Ibid.

At the time of their meeting Gabriel is the owner of a small fishing boat which provides him a meager income. Within a short time his business fails completely and he is put in jail for starting a fight with a factory official who refused to pay Gabriel fairly for a load of fish. During the two months that Gabriel is in jail he loses everything he has: the small house left to him by his foster mother and what little money he had. The only thing that brightens these dark days for Gabriel is the love and faithfulness that Aurora shows in her daily visits to see him. After he is freed, he experiences moments of depression and uncertainty. He is unsuccessful in getting another job as a sailor or fisherman, but he cannot make himself leave Aurora to look elsewhere for work, nor does he have the courage to take her with him without knowing where to go or how to earn some money. Nevertheless, because of Aurora's faithful devotion and optimistic outlook, he finally decides to leave her in order to look for a job in the nearby mines. The first indication of Aurora's influence on Gabriel is illustrated here; it is through her love and encouragement that he gains the strength and will to act.

Gabriel's mining job, unfortunately, does not last long. Within a week he loses it because he is accused of being an "anarquista virulento."⁷ In a letter to Aurora he explains what has happened and, though uncertain of his future, says he will try to get a job on a cargo ship that is to leave soon from Torremar. The last line expressed by Gabriel carries a sad and perplexing ring to it: "Ten confianza siempre en mí."⁸ It is pathetic that Gabriel--penniless and jobless--should ask such a compassionate and devoted person as Aurora to trust in him for a bright future. The constant devotion and faithfulness to Gabriel that

⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

⁸ Ibid.

Aurora exhibits, however, is a unique characteristic of their tragic love affair.

The anxiety felt by Aurora because of this sudden separation is deepened when she learns that she is pregnant. The fact that she is pregnant reveals the change that has occurred in their relationship. It has moved from the initially platonic and idealistic to the more human and realistic level. Essential to this transition is Aurora's complete devotion and surrender to Gabriel. Due to the absence of a feeling of guilt or shame for her actions, it is evident that she has felt confident of the sincerity of Gabriel's love and reciprocal devotion; consequently, she does not feel degraded or immoral.

Although she finds herself in a most undesirable situation--alone, unwed and pregnant--she demonstrates remarkable fortitude in her immediate reactions. She firmly resolves to find Gabriel before his departure in order to tell him the unexpected news which, hopefully, will change his plans and ultimately have a joyful effect on their lives. The long exhausting trip she makes in search of Gabriel proves useless; she learns that he has already departed for Torremar. The effect of this futile effort on Aurora is understandable. Realizing she must face the consequences alone, she tries to maintain her hope and trust in Gabriel throughout this difficult period.

The actions of Gabriel during his separation from Aurora are typical of a weak person. He resigns himself to the acceptance of whatever fate offers him. The first job he manages to get is the one, previously mentioned, aboard an English cargo ship en route to England by way of Estuaría. Although the job he obtains does not have exactly the same enjoyable feeling of freedom and freshness as that of a fisherman, he accepts it. The relief that Gabriel might have felt upon acquiring another job is obscured by the immense loneliness that he feels upon departing from the coast, having to leave Aurora and not

knowing when they will be together again. Without the affection and encouragement of Aurora, Gabriel wanders aimlessly and becomes easily influenced by other people. When the ship docks at Estuaria, Gabriel accompanies some acquaintances to a local bar, where he and Thor, a fellow shipmate with whom he has become friends, meet two women "de aire vulgar y rostro picaril."⁹ The evening is filled with drinking, dancing and cheap love-making. The next morning when Gabriel and Thor awaken in a hotel room, they discover that they have been robbed by the two prostitutes with whom they had spent the night and that the ship has already sailed.

When Gabriel thinks about his recent thoughtless actions, realizing the unfaithfulness and immorality exhibited in them, he becomes filled with regret and despair. It is obvious, however, that Gabriel does not hold himself responsible for jeopardizing his hope for a happy future with Aurora. On the contrary, he indicates the belief that it is the hand of fate interfering in his life. According to Gabriel, he has been prevented from working at sea or along the coast twice in his life because of the intervention of fate. Again he finds himself deprived of the work he enjoys, and feels compelled by a mysterious force to turn toward the mines for a job.

Gabriel piensa en Aurora y siente que su esperanza fluctúa y huye combatida por el destino. Le parece que ya nunca podrá conseguir en el ancho margen de las aguas una senda bonancible para su amiga y que la rosa 'kármica' le señala un rumbo fatal en las honduras de la tierra. Por dos veces su nave le arroja a las orillas hambriento y desvalido, junto a los montes desollados, y su fortuna rola con irresistible obstinación hacia el abismo de las minas. Es necesario obedecer: Dios se oculta en la roca lo mismo que en el mar¹⁰

Upon resigning himself to search for another mining job--this time, in

⁹ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 88.

the mines of Dite, he reveals a fatalistic obsession in the following statement: "¡Es la tumba que me llama a gritos!"¹¹ Throughout the novel the invincible power of fate over Gabriel's destiny is reiterated, and the gradual recognition of the futility of his struggle against his environment becomes apparent.

On the journey from Estuaria to Dite Gabriel, accompanied by Thor, sees evidence of the tragic effects of the mining industry on the land and the lives of the people. The closer he gets to the mining area, the more desolate the land becomes. At one point during the trip, the author skillfully employs the following description of the barren, lifeless, exploited land.

Ya no quedan en los contornos flores ni matas; se extinguen en la ribera los vestigios de las hierbas curativas; se borra el surco de las aves en el viento; es que han aparecido las señales desoladoras del mineral.¹²

Upon arriving at the railroad station at Naya, not far from Dite, Gabriel and Thor, quite weary and hungry by this time, meet an old man and his daughter, Vicente and Casilda Rubio, who offer them some bread and wine. While Gabriel and Thor are eating, Vicente, a perfect example of the typical miner, reveals the tragedy of his life and that of the land and the inhabitants of the area--all resulting from the devastating effect of the mining industry. Vicente, who appears much older than he is, has been a worker for more than forty years at Dite and has suffered heartbreaks, injustices and unbearable working conditions. He is now watched closely by the guards because of his association with the miners' Union of Nerva. While disclosing to the newcomers the present status of the miners, Vicente exhibits a spark of indignation when he says that ". . . los trabajadores están allí cada

¹¹ Ibid., p. 89.

¹² Ibid., p. 103.

día más oprimidos, sin derecho a defenderse ni a redimirse, padeciendo toda clase de injusticias y abusos."¹³ Knowing that Gabriel and Thor will not find a place to live in Dite, Vicente offers them lodging in his house at Monte Sorromero where people are permitted to rent rooms to miners. On the way to his house Vicente points out various sections of the mining industry and laments the irreparable devastation of the land when he cries: "¡En esta parte de la Sierra Morena los incendios de azufre no dejaron ni un nido, ni una flor, ni una hierba de salud!"¹⁴

During the next few months at Dite, the weakening of Gabriel is revealed in his increased resignation and indifference. Lacking the strength and optimism imparted to him by Aurora and constantly surrounded by an oppressive atmosphere of misery and suffering, Gabriel passively becomes integrated into the tragic mining environment. Another indication of his weakness is his acceptance and conformity to the cruel enslaving work. Although he reveals dissatisfaction with the injustices of the life there, he never actively or willfully reacts against it or attempts to change it.

The morning after his arrival at Dite before going to seek employment in the mines, Gabriel becomes depressed while watching a group of shabby, tired miners passing by the Rubio house. Casilda, whose liking for the apparently eligible bachelor was clearly visible when she first met him, reacts quickly and tries to comfort him by saying: "No te apures; con nosotros has de vivir mejor que en el mar; yo te consolaré."¹⁵ Gabriel, lacking the consoling feminine affection of Aurora, is easily seduced by the softly spoken words of the attractive

¹³ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 123.

young girl. The evasive behavior of Gabriel, when he is asked if he has a girl friend, indicates his weakening fidelity to Aurora. "Va a responder que sí, y calla seducido por la inocente bestialdad de aquel amor que le solicita."¹⁶ Instead of answering, he completely avoids the truth by asking Casilda if she is engaged. Casilda proudly and aggressively replies that she has many suitors but that she would like to marry him. The conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Pedro Abril, a violently jealous young man, who is passionately in love with Casilda. His jealousy is immediately manifested when he refuses to shake Gabriel's hand upon being introduced to him.

During Gabriel's brief trip to the mine to seek employment and on his return, the sights that he sees have a depressive effect on him. En route to the mine he encounters one of the many tragic conditions resulting from the mining industry: a slummy group of houses with half-nude women lying around and speaking crude vulgarities. As is explained by Vicente, these women make their living by prostitution and are cruelly mistreated by the miners as well as by the officials of the industry. Besides this repulsive scene, Gabriel is strangely disturbed by the drab, desolate land surrounding the rows of dilapidated houses which have "una triste monotonía impersonal como las camas de un asilo público, las celdas de la cárcel y los vagones del tren"¹⁷ Upon accepting the only job available--"en las fundiciones de Bessemer, con destino a servicios extraordinarios, en jornada de doce horas y con salario de catorce reales"¹⁸ -Gabriel experiences an unusual feeling of indifference toward himself. The depressing and

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 133.

disillusioning effect of the unexpected poverty, desolation and "aquel ambiente de martirio y amenaza"¹⁹ on Gabriel is understandable.

While in the town of Dite Gabriel sees José Luis and Rosario Garcillán, a couple of idealistic journalists whom he had met on the ship en route to Estuaria. The remark that Gabriel makes when he is introduced to the village doctor by José Luis indicates the powerful roll that fatalism plays in his life: "¡Por casualidad! murmura Gabriel con íntima zozobra; es fatalista y sabe, ya para siempre, que el destino le empuja desde el mar a los valles henchidos de veneno" ²⁰ Moments later the author skillfully describes a typical mine blasting scene which lends an air of doom and suffering to the atmosphere and fear to the inhabitants. Following the explosion, the director of the company, Martín Leurc, passes through the town. The sentiments of hate and envy felt by all the workers are seen in their cold, glaring stares. Gabriel is filled with a sudden presentiment of combate as Martín passes in front of him; it is a presentiment which is to be fulfilled later.

The last time that Aurora appeared in the novel was at the end of her futile attempt to find Gabriel; desperate, frightened and alone, she was left confronting an uncertain future, with little hope of saving herself from the undesirable event of giving birth to an illegitimate child. When she was unable to conceal her condition any longer, she was thrown from the house by her mother who refused to accept Aurora's sin. It is ironic that her mother would have pardoned her condition for money but not for love. Aurora manages to exist, nevertheless, out of the kindness and compassion of some neighbors. The anxieties, the suffering and the loneliness that she experiences during these months,

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 135.

however, become almost intolerable and are intensified when Gabriel stops writing to her. Instead of receiving love letters from him, she begins to get cruel, anonymous letters falsely informing her of Gabriel's intention to marry a nice young girl and that ". . . [él] nunca volvería a su tierra ni al dominio de la mala mujer."²¹ Not wanting to believe that Gabriel could be unfaithful to her, she tries to ignore the contents of the anonymous letters. Two sources of strength which enable Aurora to combat the apparent reality of her desertion are: ". . . la fuerza bendita del sentimiento maternal y la confianza de que Gabriel no la hubiese olvidado."²²

Toward the end of her pregnancy Aurora is seized by feelings of intense loneliness and sadness--sentiments which are immediately overcome by the elation and amazement brought into her life with the birth of her child. The immense happiness felt by Aurora at this time and the desire to share it with Gabriel make her forget his apparent abandonment of her. Thus, she writes to him eagerly describing their baby girl and hoping that her letter will finally be answered. However, the desired reply never arrives. Instead, her brief feeling of happiness is shattered upon receiving the following one-line letter: "Tu crío puede morir si aguarda por su padre."²³ None of the previous anonymous letters had wounded Aurora as deeply as this one. Therefore, having received no word from Gabriel, she begins to doubt him and believe the possibility of his desertion of her.

Beneath the immense grief that seizes her, Aurora becomes preoccupied with the future of her child. It is at this moment in Aurora's life that the struggle against her environment and background is fully

²¹ Ibid., p. 142.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., p. 143.

revealed. Having painfully endured in her very early years embarrassment, shame and loneliness because of her own illegitimacy, she resolves to provide a more honorable, happy and socially acceptable kind of life for her daughter; she is determined to begin the seemingly futile fight for the honor of her daughter:

Era preciso que la niña no se avergonzara nunca de su nacimiento, que no heredara con la deshonra aquella posibilidad de verse como la madre envuelta en la terrible noche del olvido, perdida en el mundo sin el calor de un hogar, sin la corona de un nombre considerado.²⁴

Thus, resolved to conquer her ill-fated destiny and to legalize the illegitimacy of her daughter, Aurora decides to go to Gabriel with their child and to require him to marry her.

The trip from Traşpeña to Dite is one of mental and physical torment for Aurora. Her illusion of obtaining happiness and a solution to her problems upon finding Gabriel is constantly opposed by the growing anxiety resulting from her uncertainty about Gabriel's reactions toward her. Another factor contributing to her torment is the indication of misery and suffering she sees along the way. Two encounters during the trip tragically exemplify the hopeless situation of Aurora and her child and their possible destiny. The first is when Aurora sees a little abandoned gypsy girl begging along the road. The immediate thought that occurs to Aurora is that the only crime of the pitiful child was to have been born into such a cruel world. The profound grief that Aurora feels, realizing that she has brought another innocent victim into this unmerciful world of suffering, is immediately evident.

The second painfully disillusioning experience occurs when Aurora meets three coarse, repulsive women of whom she inquires about Gabriel. Upon being informed by one of them that Gabriel lives in the same house

²⁴Ibid.

with Casilda (whom it is rumored he is to marry) and her parents, Aurora perceives--for herself and her daughter--a destiny as cruel and evil as that of the shameful prostitutes she has just met. When she is about to leave, one of the "mujeronas"²⁵ tells her that she once had a baby like Aurora's. Aurora, sincerely interested, asks if the child is still alive. The reply--"¡Qué sé yo!"²⁶--illustrates to Aurora the indifference so typical of the women there; it awakens her to her own desperate situation and spurs her toward her goal of finding Gabriel. Resulting from this encounter, Aurora recognizes her own situation:

En la voz cavernosa [de la mujerona] ruje una desesperación infinita, y al contacto brusco de aquel dolor percibe la muchacha [Aurora] la intensidad de su propia desventura, siente sobre los hombros todo el peso de su cruz; ya sabe por qué está allí y adónde se dirige: se inclina la cabeza y echa a andar.²⁷

The anxiety and torment that have been weakening Aurora throughout the trip become more intense the closer she comes to finding Gabriel and learning her fate. Nonetheless, she must endure one more demoralizing experience--the cruel and humiliating confrontation with her rival, Casilda. When she arrives in front of the Rubio house, the following is the confrontation, in dialogue, that develops between the two rivals after Aurora has said that she wants to see Gabriel:

--¿Quieres una limosna?

--¡No! --exclama la viajera con la voz endurecida por la necesidad--. ¡Quiero a Gabriel; me pertenece, es mío!

.....
Y Casilda contesta hurafía:

--No está aquí.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 148.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 151.

²⁷ Ibid.

- Le esperaré.
 --Tardará mucho.
 --Es lo mismo. Antes de subir a esta cumbre que arde,
 he bajado por él a las últimas raíces de la tierra.²⁸

Demonstrated in this dialogue are the salient characteristics of the two young women: the inalterable determination and undying love of Aurora, and the haughtiness and heartlessness of Casilda.

Immediately following this encounter, Aurora faints and is taken into the Rubio house by Estévez, a friend of the Rubio family. Estévez, an intelligent and compassionate man, quickly perceives the injustice and the grief that Casilda has caused Aurora. In an attempt to demonstrate to Casilda the wrong she has done, he scolds her and tries to explain to her the special sacredness that is inherent in motherhood: "Una madre tiene siempre algo divino, porque es la perpetuación de la vida y conoce el secreto de Dios."²⁹ Nevertheless, Casilda does not repent her actions. Instead, she proudly confesses that she had intercepted the letters from Aurora to Gabriel and had written the cruel anonymous letters to her rival. She does not regret having caused Aurora so much suffering because, as she explains, she loves Gabriel and hates Aurora. The hate, jealousy and cruelty demonstrated by Casilda here are intensified later in the novel and account for her impulsive and spiteful actions.

Prior to the tender reunion of Gabriel and Aurora, Estévez goes to meet Gabriel, who is returning from the mine, to advise him of the recent encounter between the two rivals. Informed of Casilda's confession, Gabriel is first filled with anger and revenge. However, the words of Estévez, speaking in behalf of Casilda, strongly insinuate the partial guilt that Gabriel shares for Casilda's actions since he had

²⁸ Ibid., p. 155.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 158.

avoided telling the truth about his relationship with Aurora. Reflecting on his actions since his arrival at Dite, Gabriel realizes his part in the matter and feels obligated to forgive Casilda. He is awakened to his partial guilt by certain undeniable truths:

. . . Era verdad que en algunos instantes había rendido los deseos, turbado por la mirada rubia de la moza; era verdad que al vivir con los ojos saturados de belleza padeció tentaciones miserables, y sólo se contuvo al borde de un amado recuerdo. Casilda le vio sin duda vacilar y le creyó cómplice suyo: ¡había que perdonarla!³⁰

Although Gabriel's actions concerning Casilda were consciously unintentional, it is evident that his need for feminine love and affection accounts for his evasiveness.

The reuniting of Gabriel and Aurora after their long separation is one of the most emotional and heartwarming events in their ill-fated lives. The tenderness Gabriel exhibits upon seeing and holding the baby for the first time shows the belief that it is his. In his loving glances at Aurora while she is asleep, he demonstrates the immense sorrow he feels for the suffering she has so courageously endured. Upon awaking and finding Gabriel at her side, Aurora is convinced that she has found the life and love for which she had been searching. Positive of his love for her and for their child, she finds her own faith and love revived and her fear and loneliness removed.

The actual duration of the life of Aurora and Gabriel together is brief. From her arrival to the final tragedy only two months elapse, and during this time their moments together are few. Unfortunately each becomes so entangled in the problems and the plans of the people surrounding them that their hope for a life together becomes obscured. Therefore, their struggle for personal happiness becomes impossible.

³⁰Ibid., p. 159.

Aurora, constantly surrounded by persons encountering misfortunes and suffering, feels compelled to help whenever possible and to forget her own physical weakness. One incident typical of those in which Aurora exhibits her amazing strength and warm compassion occurs when Hortensia, Casilda's sister, is wounded by a shot fired by her husband. This happens only a few hours after Aurora's arrival. Learning of the event, Aurora insists on getting out of bed to care for Hortensia. It is evident that Aurora's source of strength is the recent "plática de amor"³¹ with Gabriel and not the few hours of actual rest.

On the night of Aurora's arrival the two lovers are again separated. Gabriel is persuaded to go to a meeting to discuss plans for the miners' strike. Clearly visible in his decision to go with the other men, instead of remaining with Aurora, is the increasing importance of the miners' activities in his life and the decreasing influence of Aurora. Since he agrees to participate in the meeting, it is necessary for him to be absent from Aurora until the next evening.

In order to understand the sudden disillusionment that occurs in Aurora's life at this moment, it is necessary to discuss briefly her illusion of happiness. Essential to her idea of love and happiness is the following belief: true happiness will be the ultimate reward for the self-sacrifices and suffering made for the sake of love. Aurora expresses a part of this belief when she says to Rosario, while discussing the hardships of her search for Gabriel: "Los dolores se olvidan pronto cuando los premia la felicidad."³² Soon, however, Aurora becomes aware of the fallacy of her assumption of having obtained happiness and an end to her hardships upon finding Gabriel. She begins to realize that

³¹ Ibid., p. 178.

³² Ibid., p. 199.

the environment and the society of Dite present a threat to her hope for happiness.

The incident that awakens Aurora to the threat of the surrounding misery and suffering takes place at the railroad station at Naya. She sees a ragged old widow weeping over her only son who has just been seriously wounded in a mining accident. The disillusioning and heartbreaking effect of this scene on Aurora is seen in her uncontrollable reactions and remarks. Surrounded completely by persons whose lives are filled with sadness, suffering, fear, and violence, Aurora perceives a similar tragic destiny for herself and her daughter. She grasps her baby and hugs her "con transportes de quejosa ternura, caída súbitamente desde lo alto de su ilusión en el abismo de la realidad."³³

Realizing the life of misery that may possibly await her daughter there, Aurora murmurs mournfully, "¡Esta vida le espera! Tendrá una juventud como la mía, una vejez como la de esa otra madre."³⁴ Aurora rebels against the thought of such a tragic destiny. "¡No, no; yo no quiero; vámonos de aquí! . . . ¡ayúdame tú!"³⁵ Instead of consoling and encouraging words, she hears only a fatalistic, pessimistic reply from Rosario that infers the existence of worse conditions elsewhere. Aurora cannot presently resign herself to this fact.

Upon arriving at Nerva, where the Union headquarters is located and where Aurora is to stay with Rosario during the preparations for the strike, she becomes worried again about not being officially married to Gabriel and, thus, the illegitimacy of her daughter. Obvious in Aurora's fear for the honor of her child is the threat she feels of some unforeseen disaster that might prevent her from making the child legitimate. When Aurora reveals to Rosario her concern about not

³³ Ibid., p. 202.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 202-203.

being married, Rosario tries to comfort her by saying that she will soon be married. Rosario's efforts, however, are not effective in alleviating Aurora's worries.

. . . Pero la madre [Aurora] de aquella niña, que sólo se llama Nena, siente crecer las aprensiones; nunca le ha cohibido, como en aquel momento, su situación: todo el alma se le enciende en inquietudes y delicadezas bajo las palabras generosas de su amiga.³⁶

Only minutes after arriving at the Union, it is learned that the wives of some mining officials have invited a few women associated with the miners to discuss the existing problems of the workers. The unanticipated participation of Aurora in this meeting develops into an enlightening experience for her. The invitation apparently results from the desire of the bienhechoras (the wives of the officials) to arrive at a settlement that might avoid unnecessary suffering and bloodshed which would inevitably result from a strike. During the meeting Aurora becomes fully informed of all the injustices suffered by the miners and the dangerous conditions under which they constantly work. She also learns about the accepted attitudes regarding the existence of the poor and their means of achieving happiness. When one of the officials says that there have been and will always be poor people and rich people, Rosario firmly replies, "Y siempre los pobres tratan de mejorar su destino."³⁷ At this moment the priest (considered by the miners a member of the wealthy rather than of the poor) intervenes with a suggested cure for the dissatisfaction of the poor: resignation to their fate.

Para eso nos sirve la fe y la resignación cristianas, . . . saber conformarse con la suerte equivale a la felicidad de aquí abajo, y a que se nos dé por añadidura el reino de los cielos.³⁸

³⁶ Ibid., p. 215.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 226.

³⁸ Ibid.

The idea of resigning herself to a life of poverty and all its misfortunes is humiliating and unthinkable for Aurora. The inner turmoil that soon develops in her is understandable.

During the return trip to Nerva from the meeting at Vista Hermosa, Aurora can think only of Gabriel and his safety. She becomes filled with an increasing fear of something that might endanger his life and, consequently, their life together. Partly responsible for her depression and anxiety is the gloominess that pervades the countryside. Aurora's tension, however, is temporarily relieved when she unexpectedly sees Gabriel arriving at the railroad station at Naya where they both board the train to return to Nerva. The happiness they experience from the mere pleasure of being together illustrates the power of their love and, furthermore, the illusion that this love will resolve all the problems confronting them. It is evident that the two bonds uniting their lives so strongly and on which their love is based are: the hardships they have endured and the hope they hold for a brighter future. Each time they find themselves together as now, regardless of how brief or how long the duration,

. . .reviven la historia de su amor, herida por la ausencia, atormentada por las dudas, y se reconocen para siempre atados por los vínculos del sufrimiento y de la esperanza.³⁹

Upon arriving at the Union in Nerva, Aurora and Gabriel agree to see each other that evening after the meeting of the miners. Apparent in Gabriel's actions and expressions when the two lovers meet again is the effect of the Union president's speech, expressing the ideas of freedom, justice and improvements in working conditions for the miners. Gabriel's attention is gradually being focused more on the problems of the workers than on his relationship with Aurora. He evidences this transition of interest through his extensive discussion of the recent

³⁹Ibid., p. 240.

developments concerning the strike. Aurora, realizing the influence of the meeting on Gabriel and the worries of the strike that seem to be seizing him, tries to shift his thoughts to their own lives by saying, "He venido para darte alegría; es necesario que seamos felices: hay que vencer el destino."⁴⁰ The means by which Aurora suggests that they gain their happiness is love.

Feeling the hope and the gentleness transmitted through Aurora's smile and tender words, Gabriel is seized by a sudden delirium of conflicting thoughts. It is clear that this conflict results from his desire for a life of happiness and freedom with Aurora and the increasing imprisonment he feels enveloping him in the misery and suffering surrounding him. The sudden scene he envisions of himself " . . . preso en el círculo metálico como a los grilletes de un calabozo . . ." ⁴¹ causes him despair. In an effort to escape the hopelessness and turmoil resulting from his thoughts, he takes a ring, made of black volcanic stone, from his pocket and gives it to Aurora. Although somewhat shocked by the ominous color, Aurora gladly accepts this substitute for a wedding band. To her, it signifies the first step toward their marriage. Seizing this perfect opportunity to discuss the matter, Aurora immediately asks when they can be married. Upon expressing their mutual desire to marry as soon as possible, they realize the inevitable problem confronting them: the difficulty of obtaining their authorized birth certificates. Again the two lovers are forced to face the tragic and painful reality of their illegitimacy and its interminable effect on their lives.

The recognition of this difficulty fills Gabriel with bitterness and hate for the unknown persons responsible for their illegitimacy and the

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 269.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 270.

suffering and hardships in their lives. He begins to feel more intensely the oppressive pressures of an inalterable tragic destiny--one in which he is a slave shackled to the misery of his environment and to that caused by his heritage. The obsession that is gradually developing in Gabriel is clearly evident at this time: the more enslaved he feels to the misery and the brutal work in the mines and the more difficult he sees the attainment of his freedom and the fulfillment of his wishes concerning Aurora, the more he becomes possessed by the desire to destroy the tentacles of the mines holding him there. In order to perform such a task, Gabriel realizes that he must choose one of the two alternatives that he perceives:

. . .derribarlos [los cerros andaluces que son los carceleros] con el picachón, golpe a golpe, o . . .abrirse una salida por los minados, si ha de huir con su amor a recobrar una playa y un bajel.⁴²

Not wanting to destroy the happiness and the tranquility he sees in Aurora, Gabriel refrains from disclosing his wild and uncontrollable thoughts to her. He tries to restrain himself and to listen attentively to the more pleasant thought introduced by Aurora, namely, that of their child.

During the next three days an air of uneasiness and tension pervades the town while the preparations for the strike are being concluded. No one fails to participate in the vital activities, the ultimate result of which will be justice for the miners. Even the women take an active part by secretly distributing leaflets to all the miners still at work in the mines. Aurora is no exception. When the strike officially goes into effect and the workers leave their jobs, it is the end of many long hours of toil but the beginning of endless hunger, sickness, exhaustion, and despair. The eve of the strike is heralded with unanticipated violence on the part of the militia. The mining officials, fearing

⁴²Ibid., p. 271.

a bloody revolt of the workers, send soldiers to the town with orders to shoot anyone who appears to be suspicious. The elements of rain and darkness contribute to the turmoil that erupts in the streets. Many innocent people become the victims of the fatal shots fired by the soldiers.

One of the innocent victims of the unwarranted tragedy is Nena, Aurora's child. Although she is shot during the turmoil of the street fighting, she is not wounded by a bullet intended for the strikers; instead, she is fatally wounded by a shot fired by Casilda. The death of Nena occurs when Aurora, returning to the Union with her child in the midst of the shooting, stops in the middle of the street, apparently frightened and undecided about what she should do. The moment of hesitation brings death to the child in Aurora's arms. It is logical to assume, however, that the fatal shot was intended for Aurora. The following passage describes Casilda's actions, attitude and the atmosphere during the moments leading to the death of Nena:

. . . Casilda en el primer instante de inquietud, y obediente a una invencible fascinación va siguiendo a su rival [Aurora] hasta la puerta de la casa: desde allí la ve detenerse a pocos pasos, irresoluta.

Llega por el callizo penumbroso el fragor aciago de la contienda, un olor de sangre y de muerte que sacude a la de Rubio [Casilda] el alma, borrascosa lo mismo que la noche. De pronto se hunde en el zaguán y vuelve con la pistola de Fanjul en la mano. Da un salto de tigre, apunta y dispara sobre Aurora.⁴³

The impulsiveness of Casilda's actions stems from her hatred and jealousy of Aurora.

The death of Nena has both a temporary and a far reaching effect on Gabriel and Aurora. Both are profoundly grief-stricken and filled with disbelief. The grief they suffer is sharpened by the recollection

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 336-337.

of their child's illegitimacy and her lack of a name other than Nena. Aurora, unaware of the real assassin, becomes temporarily obsessed by the unanswered question--"¿Por qué la mataron?"⁴⁴--which she keeps asking Gabriel. She is unable to believe that "Era el sino de la inocente."⁴⁵--an answer supplied by an old woman. Fortunately, however, Aurora's sorrow is alleviated somewhat when she recognizes the existence of many other people in need of help and comfort. Thus, her grief is obscured by the suffering and misfortunes of others surrounding her.

During the days immediately following the tragic death of Nena, Gabriel offers his aid to the numerous other victims of violence. Visible in his actions is the effort to conceal his own grief by becoming immersed in the problems of others. Furthermore, unable to explain to himself and to Aurora why their child was killed, Gabriel takes advantage of this opportunity to escape the continual questioning of Aurora. It appears that Gabriel is truly frightened by Aurora's voice when she repeats the same unanswered question.

One month later Gabriel exhibits a preoccupation with the mystery of death--a preoccupation which had begun with the death of Nena. Many of his actions reveal an unusual desire to actually "touch" death, to know what it signifies and what lies beyond it. One incident that illustrates this strange desire developing in Gabriel is the relocating of the village cemetery which is in danger of sinking. Gabriel eagerly volunteers for this dangerous and macabre task.

Gabriel Suárez ayuda a Estévez en el generoso traslado, y es el primero en cargar sobre los hombros las urnas heladas, llenas de cenizas. Desde que tuvo a la Nena inmóvil encima de su corazón, trata de familiarizarse con la muerte: una inclinación

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 338.

⁴⁵Ibid.

dolorosa le induce a perseguir el atroz misterio, sin saber que ninguna mirada se ha posado en las orillas de la eternidad.⁴⁶

The cold, glaring, persistent expression visible in Gabriel's eyes during the moments of this job reveals his growing insatiable desire to explore the mystery of death--a desire impossible to fulfill in life. Furthermore, he seems to express a certain degree of envy of the tranquility he perceives in the tombs.

In order to understand fully Gabriel's obsession with death and the ensuing tragedy, it is necessary to describe briefly the conditions of the people and the town at the end of one month following the strike. The dominant characteristic of the people is suffering; they are living in absolute misery. With all the funds of the Union depleted, there is no money for food or medicine. Hunger and sickness are present everywhere, with little hope of relief. Morale is at its lowest, for there is only doubt regarding any settlement of the strike. Many heart-breaking farewells result from the emigration of the old and the young who, by necessity, must leave their families for other towns in order to survive. In addition to this ". . .monstruoso naufragio de los hogares, . . ." ⁴⁷ there are numerous suicides of people who are unable to endure the continued suffering.

Apparent in Gabriel is the oppressive and exhausting effect that such hopeless, painful and miserable conditions can have on an already weakened and preoccupied person. Perceiving no way of freeing himself from the rapidly tightening shackles of misery, Gabriel finally succumbs to the fate dictated by the mysterious attraction of the mines and his obsession with death. Believing that there is no feasible way to achieve a life of happiness and good fortune, since fate has always opposed him,

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 356.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 370.

Gabriel begins to concentrate solely on death.

The events immediately prior to his death are essential to making his personally selfish escape from misery appear a noble and sacrificial act. Only a few hours after Gabriel returns from the gruesome task at the cemetery, it is learned that the ultimatum sent to the mining officials has been categorically rejected. The first impulse of the enraged miners is to march on Vista Hermosa and wage a brutal battle against the officials. Perceiving the inevitable slaughter that would result for the miners from such an attack, the Union president suggests a more sensible and less violent procedure which will nonetheless fulfill the miners' desire for revenge. The proposal consists of exploding the largest and most productive of the mines. Necessary for this act of revenge is a skillful and knowledgeable miner--one who, because of the nature of the job, will sacrifice his own life.

The unequivocal and immediate acceptance of this job by Gabriel shows his mysterious desire to die; realizing that he will do so upon completing the task, he volunteers by saying, "¡Ese minero que necesitáis soy yo!"⁴⁸ The mysterious personal attraction that has been apparent in Gabriel since his first job as a miner is again emphasized when he refuses to let Estévez accompany him to the mine: "¡No! contesta, recóndito el acento, pungidas las palabras de un fatalismo implacable. 'Las bocas de la tierra no le llaman a usted, ¡es a mí!'"⁴⁹ Gabriel leaves immediately to meet his fate in the depths of the mines, ". . . con el paso firme, la cabeza erguida."⁵⁰ The only sign of farewell to Aurora that he makes upon departing forever is a mere gesture of his hand.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 378.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 379.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The voluntary death of Gabriel can be viewed in the light of two opposing factors. Firstly, as it is considered by the people of Dite, it is a noble act of self-sacrifice, committed to avenge the miners for their wrongs. Secondly, beneath this noble disguise, it is an escape from a life of misery. Realizing his inability to alter his life destined to misfortune and suffering, Gabriel prefers death to a continuation of such an existence. Although he reveals sorrow for Aurora's suffering, in the last moments of his life, it is evident that his desire for freedom from misery is stronger.

Gabriel's preference for death has a pathetic effect on Aurora. Her first reaction is to follow him, but her own physical weakness and her recognition of the futility of such an effort prevent her pursuit of him. Prior to the explosion, Aurora maintains some hope for Gabriel's safety and eventual return to her. But upon actually seeing the flames flying from the entrance of the mine, she realizes the impossibility of such a thought. The reality of Gabriel's death fills Aurora with inconsolable grief--grief which is finally alleviated somewhat by her acceptance of the following religious conviction expressed by Estévez: "La muerte es un vado entre los mundos: somos incorruptibles en Dios, que nunca muere."⁵¹ The relief received by Aurora through this belief is not, however, sufficiently consoling to prevent her falling into the depths of grief and despair. It is evident that, as it is expressed by Estévez, Aurora "¡Está desposada con la muerte!"⁵² Thus, the tragic story of the ill-fated lives of Gabriel and Aurora ends with Aurora resigning herself to a life of loneliness, sadness and suffering in one of ". . . los pueblos olvidados . . ."⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 401.

⁵² Ibid., p. 402.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 403.

where she can only face "la muerte, la soledad, la perdición."⁵⁴

As it is figuratively thought by Estévez, ". . .allí . . .se queda el Amor [Aurora] velando a la Muerte [Gabriel] con sublime virtud de eternidad, sobre la roca primitiva del mundo" ⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 405.

CHAPTER IV

EL CÁLIZ ROJO

El Cáliz rojo, which has been appropriately called "una sinfonía de dolor,"¹ is a spiritual tragedy, almost devoid of external action. The novel presents the agonizing mental torture suffered by the extremely sensitive and devoted protagonist, Soledad Fontenebro, after she has been inexplicably deserted by her husband. Upon being abandoned by him and, consequently, forced to try to build a new and meaningful life, she goes to Germany, a place totally unfamiliar to her, where she meets Ismael Dávalos. The two principal factors responsible for her ensuing psychological struggle are: her tenuous desire to forget the heartbreaking episode in her life and to find new happiness, and her tenacious obsession of remaining eternally faithful to her husband. The inconsolable grief that she suffers is skillfully depicted within an exotic and romantic environment whose natural elements, afforded by an immense forest and beautiful lake, serve to emphasize, intensify and reflect the emotions of the two principal characters, Soledad and Ismael. Furthermore, the idealistic qualities of unblemished purity and fidelity exhibited by Soledad are greatly enhanced by the banal postwar German society.

The first few pages of the novel introduce Ismael Dávalos, a Sephardic Jew, whose keen and selective sense of human interest has been strangely aroused by the enigmatic character of Soledad. A brief discussion of Ismael's principal traits is essential for an understanding of the immediate attraction and interest he feels for this heartbroken woman. As a kind, unselfish, intelligent, and profoundly sensitive

¹S. L. Millard Rosenberg, "Concha Espina," Hispania, X (February, 1927), 327.

gentlemen, Ismael is especially sympathetic toward people who, in appearance, are the victims of unjust suffering. His own personal experiences with continued racial persecutions are responsible for his deep compassion for such unfortunate persons. Being a member of the Jewish race, he has lived a life full of undeserved hardships, sadness and suffering. Nevertheless, regardless of the seemingly insurmountable and humiliating events in his life, he is exceedingly proud of his lineage and, furthermore, has developed a remarkably strong will and resistance to the debilitating effects of racial discrimination and persecution.

Prior to the actual meeting of Ismael and Soledad, Ismael formulates his own idea about the apparent sadness he sees in Soledad; he does not perceive it as the result of any physical illness, as do the townspeople, but rather because she is ". . . un espíritu devorado por las siniestras pupilas del Dolor."² When Ismael fails in his effort to meet Soledad casually during her frequent strolls, he tries to learn something about her through Agnes, the wife of Maybach, the game-warden, at whose house Soledad is staying. Although the information is of little factual value, it places additional emphasis on the unhappiness in her life and stimulates Ismael's interest to unveil the mystery of such grief. Therefore, determined to become acquainted with her, he devises a plan to effect his desired introduction.

Early one afternoon, Ismael goes to Maybach's house, where he frequently enjoys pleasantly stimulating discussions. By arriving sooner than is customary, Ismael is almost certain of meeting Soledad since she takes afternoon walks at a regular time. His assumption proves to be correct, for only a few brief words of introduction are needed for the beginning of their friendship.

²Concha Espina, Obras completas (segunda edición; Madrid: Ediciones Fax, 1955), I, p. 678.

During their first walk through the forest, following some comments on its beauty, Ismael tries to shift their discussion to more personal topics; he successfully draws attention to their similarities of origin and language. In an effort to make Soledad feel more relaxed with a stranger in a foreign land, he proceeds to discuss at length his own background:

Dávalos insiste en referir algo de sí mismo, como si quisiera ofrecer a su amiga un testimonio de confianza. Se ha educado en París; conoce Europa y una parte de América; viene a Woltersdorf para descansar de un viaje de negocios a los Estados Unidos.³

While he is talking, he is somewhat disturbed by the distance and lack of responsiveness exhibited by Soledad. Hoping to elicit some attentive and informative response, he politely asks her to tell him something about herself. Although she appears rather reluctant to disclose anything about herself, she does reveal some generalities about her life during the remainder of their conversation. Thus, Ismael learns much about her present attitude toward life, the cause of her unhappiness and the inner torment that she is suffering. The fact that she relates such personal matters to a stranger demonstrates her desperate need for relief from her psychologically debilitating grief. Because of this visible need, it is understandable that she temporarily avails herself of the companionship offered to her by Ismael. Upon being asked to tell him something about herself, she reveals the personal insignificance of her present life and her resultant despair. The following reply is made by Soledad after being asked if she does not have anything to tell:

Nada interesante. Ya sabe usted mi nombre; soy española, según usted adivina; viaje por hastío y falta de salud, no sé qué hacer en el mundo . . . Y tengo ganas de morirme.⁴

³ Ibid., p. 680.

⁴ Ibid., p. 681.

The thought of Soledad's desire to die seems inconceivable to Ismael. When he expresses his disbelief of such an idea, Soledad proceeds to explain that her present life consists of nothing but mental agony and, thus, she no longer wants to live. The only possible answer to resolve her desperate situation is death: "La muerte es el único soplo que apaga los dolores."⁵

Ismael, having endured many injustices in his own life, feels compelled to find some way to relieve the apparently undeserved suffering of such a disconsolate figure as Soledad. Before suggesting a consoling path, however, he tries to learn the exact reason for her grief. Through the sincerity and tenderness he employs while treating this touchy subject, he succeeds in getting Soledad to relate the tragic, unforgettable episode in her life. First, she answers that her unhappiness has been caused by a man. In spite of her effort to remain calm, she becomes quite distressed upon being asked if the man is still alive. The humiliation and excruciating agony felt by Soledad, being faced with the reality of her abandonment, are apparent when she immediately begs Ismael to be quiet. After a few moments of silence, during which time Soledad manages to regain her composure, she reveals her belief that she is not personally responsible for her husband's desertion; her only crime was that of falling so deeply in love. This conviction is expressed in the following passage spoken by Soledad:

No crea usted que soy una mujer culpable; no conozco la tiniebla del remordimiento ni el sabor de la mentira y el engaño: en mi conciencia no hay sombras ni lagunas. Yo era libre y enajené mi libertad para siempre con la firmeza y el desinterés de un amor único: ése es todo mi delito.⁶

Realizing the tragic effect of such an heartbreaking experience on a sensitive and emotional person like Soledad, Ismael immediately tries

⁵ Ibid., p. 682.

⁶ Ibid.

to convince her that she can find happiness again. The first suggestion he makes is that she forget her past. This vitally necessary step, however, is presently impossible for Soledad, for, as she says, she does not know how to forget. The apparently irreversible hopelessness seen in her is unbearable for Ismael. Aware of her desperate need of understanding and affection following this shattering experience in her life, he attempts to win her trust and confidence by alluding to his own hardships and misfortunes. Again, focusing on another similarity in their lives, he says: "Tampoco yo he conseguido mi codiciado pan, y tengo un corazón diestro en padecer; ¡confíe usted en mí!"⁷ He, then, extends the idea of suffering to be universally inclusive: ". . . toda existencia es sufrimiento No dude usted que el Dolor ha nacido con la Humanidad."⁸ The universality of suffering, however, does not mean that it is distributed fairly, for, according to Ismael, that of Soledad is indubitably unjust. The temporary comforting feeling that Soledad receives upon hearing this assertion of the injustice of her suffering is understandable. Likewise, her need to believe in her own innocence is evident when she makes the following vehement reply:

. . . yo no hice mal a nadie, y me toca demasiada desventura. Sólo he conocido la incierta dicha de una esperanza: me entregué sin reserva, con absoluta fe . . . para encontrar el sacrilegio en lo más puro y sagrado de mi vida.⁹

The remainder of this informative conversation consists of moments of intermittently melancholic and painful reflections on the part of Soledad. Her trembling voice and grimaces frequently indicate the sadness she feels for the incomprehensible loss of her past life.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p. 683.

⁹ Ibid.

One attempt that she makes to calm herself indicates the deep love that she still feels for her husband and her desire to guard that memory. Remembering the happiness that she had once enjoyed, she states that the only material symbol she still possesses of it is her wedding ring. "Esto me queda del bien que tuve, dice, mirándole con aspasionada expectación."¹⁰

It is easy for Ismael to perceive the spiritual benefit that Soledad could obtain if she could believe that her husband still loved her. Encouraging this belief, Ismael says: "El culto que usted mantiene con tales bríos aún puede reflorcer en el traidor."¹¹ However, the implication of her husband's unfaithfulness denoted in the word traidor evokes an ambivalent reaction from Soledad. Upon hearing Ismael refer to her husband in such a way, she commands him not to call him traidor. Then she admits that her husband is a traidor but forbids anyone else to say so. A few moments later she contradicts herself by claiming that he is not. The ambivalence demonstrated here by Soledad is clear. She is filled with heartbreak and bitterness upon confronting the reality of her husband's desertion. On the other hand, she guards her idealistic conception of her husband by forbidding herself or anyone else to dwell long on the idea of his infidelity, which would tarnish her illusion of their love.

The initial impact of having made the acquaintance of Soledad is perplexing and captivating for Ismael. After leaving her, he becomes absorbed in thoughts revolving around this unquestionably superior woman just introduced into his life. He is infatuated by the qualities of deep emotion, tenderness and sublime love that he envisions her to possess--qualities that distinguish her from all the other women he has known. After hours of meditating on a possible future life with her, he

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

concludes that he must devote himself completely to her--to her love as well as her sorrow: ". . . deduce que ya no podrá vivir sin consagrarse al dolor y la ternura de la amada."¹² The problem presented by Soledad's present inability to forget her heartbreaking past seems to Ismael without solution at this time. Nevertheless, the certainty of his love for her, coupled with his desire to break the tenacious memory of her misfortune, is sufficient to cause him to dedicate himself with almost religious devotion and adoration to Soledad. The following passage describes this noble, generous intention--one which he relates to Soledad during their next meeting:

Piensa en su amiga con el alto propósito de darle un albergue para el duro martirio; será su caballero, le alumbrará el triste corazón asentado en la tinieblas hasta conseguir que se cure y confíe en la aventura.¹³

In order to understand Soledad's actions when she sees Ismael the following night, it is essential to discuss briefly the initial effect that this acquaintance has had on her. The night after her first meeting with Ismael is one of inner turmoil, the cause of which is apparently the conflict she feels developing between her fidelity to her husband and her desire for happiness and freedom from her grief. Having met someone so genuinely compassionate, understanding and interested in her, it is evident that she envisions the possible life of happiness that would result from a friendship with Ismael. But the threat presented by such a relationship to her painfully unrealistic faithfulness is frightening. Thus, endeavoring to keep the image of her love and fidelity beautiful and untarnished, she persists in playing the role of the ideal, faithful and devoted wife, regardless of the suffering it causes her. She tries vigorously to ignore and conceal the reality of her desire for happiness by excessively reserved behavior. Frequently, however,

¹² Ibid., p. 684.

¹³ Ibid., p. 685.

unable to conceal the suffering that her extremely idealistic fidelity causes her, she begins to cry.

Upon visiting Soledad the next evening, Ismael quickly recognizes her inner torment and her desperate need to discuss her anxieties with someone. He seizes every feasible opportunity to pursue the subject of love and to persuade Soledad of a more sane approach to life. The first attempt he makes to advise her to forget the unfortunate episode in her life occurs while she is putting an apparently old letter in a drawer. Believing that the letter, in all probability, contains the shattering news of her husband's desertion, he asks her why she still keeps it. After hearing her reply ". . . para convencerme de que no sufro una pesadilla, . . ." ¹⁴ he tells her that she must not remember but forget such a cruel reality. He supports this idea by explaining that everything dies, signifying the possible termination of her futile love. The following reply, however, illustrates her disagreement with this idea and her persistence in playing the role of the inalterable faithful wife: "Se equivoca. Hay algo que siempre nace: yo seré firme y nueva en mi pasión toda la vida y más allá de la muerte." ¹⁵ Upon speaking these words, Soledad becomes mentally detached, apparently lost in her tragic memories. Even Ismael's mention of a science ". . . de amar y de vivir . . ." ¹⁶ fails to get her attention.

In the closing moments of this visit, however, Ismael manages to strike a chord of response in Soledad. Responsible for awakening her to the suffering being caused by her dedication is the following analogy in which Ismael compares the sunrise he saw earlier to Soledad's burning

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 689.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 690.

¹⁶ Ibid.

heart: ". . . me parecía un cáliz inmenso y ardiente, la copa divina de un corazón de mujer."¹⁷ Upon hearing this comparison, Soledad immediately breaks into tears. It is evident that she feels more intensely the grief of her own heartbreak and can no longer conceal her suffering. Instead of pitying herself, Ismael exhorts her to be proud of possessing a heart capable of such deep love, for, according to him, love saves. Soledad modifies this idea by specifying the necessity of happiness in love in order for it to save; otherwise, one can easily die from love.

The immutability of Soledad's tragically futile love, evidenced in her reply, is disheartening to Ismael. Feeling that only divine words can bring solace to Soledad, he suggests that they pray together. Her refusal to heed this advice is rather perplexing. Her explanation, however, is enlightening: she must pray alone, for her prayers are often filled with bitterness. The following passage contains the explanation of her necessity to pray alone, as it is stated to Ismael:

Mi plegaria es una, ya se lo dije. Y muchas veces se me enturbia de envidia, hasta de odio--su acento dulcísimo viró a un tono brusco--es una cosa horrible, una hiel que jamás tuve en mí!¹⁸

Regardless of the irreligious sentiments that may seize Soledad in her prayers, Ismael persists in his plea to pray with her, hoping that some alleviation might be delivered to her. Upon leaving, he makes one last emotional attempt to persuade her to accept his help. "¿No me deja servirla? ¿Rechaza usted mi auxilio, mi apoyo? ¡Tenga misericordia de mí! Soy un pobre errante sin patria y sin amor; un desgraciado como usted!"¹⁹ Soledad's trivial and irrelevant words of farewell

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 691.

¹⁹ Ibid.

indicate her present rejection of Ismael's compassionate gesture. She appears even more distant now than in their first meeting.

Soledad's actions soon manifest her deep regret for having behaved so selfishly and unappreciatively toward Ismael. The very initiative she shows upon going to visit him the next afternoon reveals her desire to continue her relationship with him, although not on a truly serious, intimate level. Due to her effort to discuss and concentrate on matters related to Ismael instead of herself, it is evident that she hopes to obtain a period of alleviation from her inner torment. The pretext of her visit is that of delivering news of the restoration of Palestine, which should signify the attainment of a homeland for Ismael. At first, she appears genuinely interested in Ismael; she exhibits tenderness and sympathy for the persecutions and hardships to which the Jewish race has been subjected. Soledad's own sorrows become temporarily obscured by her mental and emotional involvement in the unhappy aspects of Ismael's life. Nonetheless, their discussion soon becomes focused on Soledad. The element responsible for this transition is essentially the prolonged concentration on the attainment of a homeland which causes Soledad to fall hopelessly into the tortures of her mind, specifically--the sadness and loneliness resulting from her self-imposed banishment.

The detachment that she exhibits upon being absorbed into her memories is quickly recognized by Ismael. Aware of the detrimental effect of every moment she spends immersed in her grief, he endeavors to propose some illusory, optimistic idea, hopefully capable of freeing her from distress. Based on his belief in the physical vastness of the world, he assures her of the existence of much more pleasant places in which she could live. In Soledad's reply, supporting an opposing view of the world and emphasizing the spiritual element rather than the physical, she indicates her opinion of the inferiority and the smallness

of human hearts. The perceptible tone of pride that is heard in this remark demonstrates her own feeling of superiority--the source of which is evident: her sense of the incomparability of her capacity and decision to endure such spiritual torment. The following passage is the author's concise description of the factors from which Soledad's self-esteem originates:

Ella no rehusa lo que hay de dolor en el amor, afronta el abandono y la soledad, el destierro y la muerte; pero no admite el olvido ni confía en las rutas abiertas a nuevos goces.²⁰

Recognizing Soledad's feeling of superiority, Ismael initiates an endeavor to convince her of the absurdity of her actions, of her fidelity to someone apparently unworthy of her lofty sentiments. Soledad's reply--"¡Puede ser!"²¹--illustrates her partial admission to the futility of her devotion. To Ismael, this reply signifies the existence of a tenuous desire for freedom from her painfully enslaving bond. Thus, hoping to stimulate and strengthen this vaguely perceptible desire, he prescribes an elaborate plan of emotional salvation. The primary factor expressed in his proposal is that she permit him to show her beautiful, peaceful places where he can teach her to live happily. He emphasizes that because of her superior qualities she deserves a life of happiness. Although she may not obtain a sublime love equivalent to that of her past, he claims that she can enjoy affection and companionship by accepting other kinds of relationships. Explaining this idea, Ismael says, "Hay más cariños que uno. Si no logramos la pasión rara y excelsa, aún tenemos amistades, admiraciones, fraternidad" ²²

The skeptical, pessimistic attitude exhibited by Soledad during the course

²⁰ Ibid., p. 700.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p. 702.

of Ismael's sincere attempt to discover some possible solution to her grief causes him to alter the focal point of his discussion. His transition in thought concentrates on Soledad's own contribution to her suffering which, in essence, is her refusal to accept anyone's aid, her insistence on living in a world inhabited by painful memories.

Soledad's tacit denial of the validity of this reality forces Ismael to speak more vehemently and to change the direction of his argument. Aware of his failure to illuminate any means of solace for Soledad, he believes it necessary to examine the actual facts of the story which she tries so painfully to conceal. Hoping to persuade her to disclose such details, he reasons that an objective analysis will facilitate their search for a remedy to her heartache. The following passage presents the truth, according to Soledad, of her love and the unexpected, incomprehensible dissolution of her marriage:

Escuche mi verdad; la única que poseo. Yo amo a ese hombre que usted dice hasta la idolatría. Tuve en él la misma fe que en Dios, le rendí las entrañas con el deleite sublime de darme a su embriaguez como un sacramento. No hubo jamás nube ni sombra en mi conciencia para esta pasión. El merecía siempre mis adoraciones: era el primer enamorado, el primer caballero del mundo. Un día, un día ignominioso, a traición, por sorpresa, me dejó en mitad del camino!²³

Upon being asked if her husband's desertion was caused by the interference of another woman, Soledad, seized by jealousy, immediately breaks into a violent, irrational avowal of her own irreplaceability and the indestructibility of her love. The necessity of these two illusions for Soledad is obvious. Ismael, not understanding precisely why she should suffer so much if she considers her love indissoluble, asks her why she believes her grief incurable. The answer she gives is that her image of that love has been tarnished; "Porque ese amor ya no vive

²³ Ibid., p. 704.

ejemplar y glorioso, . . . se ha despeñado en un abismo y su propia grandeza, al deshacerse, le cubre de reproches. ¡Mi pena es infinita!"²⁴

It is evident, however, that the unknown reason for her husband's abandonment is also responsible for her torment. Perceiving this tragically haunting question, Ismael begins to crucify verbally her worthless, irresponsible and cruel husband. His harsh accusations are interrupted by Soledad when she says, "¡Calle usted! No hay una culpa solitaria: toda la Humanidad es pecadora."²⁵ The implication made here is that her husband is not totally to blame but that she, too, must be in some way responsible for his abandoning her. The ensuing remark made by Soledad, expressing her acceptance of life "Como una penitencia, . . ." ²⁶ reveals that she is deeply sorry for whatever she may have done to cause the dissolution of her marriage. Furthermore, her acceptance of partial guilt provides a means of protecting her idealistic image of her husband.

The replies made by Soledad during the succeeding intense inquiry are evasive and contradictory. She refuses to tell her husband's name, the place of her birth or even the actual duration of her marriage. Upon being asked how long she had been married, she answers in a rather delirious tone: "¡Mucho! ¡He vivido para él siempre!"²⁷ At one point in the conversation she appears vexed by Ismael's intimate questions and tells him that he seems like a spy. She then apologizes but says that he wants to know too much about her past. This slight

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 705.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 706.

criticism does not deter Ismael's questioning, however, for he feels compelled to find out the possible reactions of Soledad if she were to know the present condition of her husband. Thus, he raises a hypothetical situation about what effect her husband's happiness or misfortune would have on her. The contradiction demonstrated in her replies reveals the hoplessness of her case. Regardless of her own grief, she would not be consoled by learning of her husband's sadness, but his happiness would frighten her. It is easy but disheartening for Ismael to recognize the dark, lonely future that awaits Soledad. He inquires: "¿De manera que no hay un camino luminoso para usted . . . ?"²⁸ One would think that the gloomy inference made here would be disconcerting to Soledad; on the contrary, she calmly replies, "¡El mío ya sabe usted que no tiene horizontes!"²⁹

Due to the discouraging persistence on suffering revealed by Soledad's reply, it is understandable that Ismael should appear dejected and distressed, knowing that his own life will be one of loneliness and frustration without Soledad. Although he still anxiously desires to be with her again after this meeting, his mind is flooded with heartbreaking and pessimistic thoughts--thoughts which summarize the significance of their relationship and predict its destiny. The following passage provides a concise description of their brief encounter and its inevitable conclusion:

Son dos peregrinos que se encuentran, hacen juntos una caminata . . . y después, se despiden. No debe exigir nada más a la mujer de otro, aunque ella marche sin rumbo y nunca llegue al hogar perdido. Una congoja insoportable le tortura pensando que los dos viven locamente de la incierta ilusión: ¡el símbolo de la tierra prometida!³⁰

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 707.

³⁰ Ibid.

The last pre-arranged visit between Soledad and Ismael occurs at the Torre de Vistas, the centrally located watchtower of Woltersdorf, which affords a picturesque view of the beauty of the city. The author's selection of this site is logical, for the natural elements of the environment provide an emotionally stimulating atmosphere. Furthermore, the dramatic moral contrast seen in the German people passing by the tower enhances the spiritual purity of Soledad. These two factors--the physical atmosphere and the spiritual contrast--contribute indirectly to Soledad's psychosomatic seizure which transpires during the closing moments of this meeting.

Initially, Soledad's and Ismael's conversation is directed toward the carefree, stagnant, immoral German society which inspires Soledad with deep compassion and forgiveness simply because, as she explains, ". . . todos los desgraciados me inspiran tanta misericordia!"³¹ Ismael's opposing sentiments are indicated when he expresses his low opinion of these spiritually devoid creatures who, in his words, constitute ". . . una sociedad moza y ruda, ávida de espectáculos íntimos, enteramente abandonada a su trance de suprema caída."³² Somewhat perplexed by the irony previously evidenced in Soledad's feelings toward these people, Ismael is compelled to find out a more substantial reason for her attitude. Thus, he asks if she approves of their lustful, vulgar behavior. Although she states unequivocally her disapproval, she claims that ". . . puede haber en su libertinaje una forma de suicidio."³³ Revealed in this statement are Soledad's judgment and justification of their behavior: she considers their outer happiness as a way of concealing their inner sadness; she perceives their lasciviousness as a

³¹ Ibid., p. 708.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

means to deaden their senses to grief and disappointments.

Following this difference of opinion Ismael becomes immersed in deep meditation, the cause of which is the contrast he sees between the spiritual purity of Soledad and the immorality of the surrounding society. Because of Soledad's apparent rejection of earthly pleasures, he deduces that she is a symbol whose purpose is:

. . .mantener los fundamentos del Heroísmo como una esfinge de la Abnegación. Así, ahora, esta imagen representativa de España recoge el cetro del ideal, para sostener en el ara caliente de la profunda llanura los principios de unas virtudes que no pueden morir,³⁴

This lofty spiritual portrait, however, is suddenly shattered by Ismael's renewed awareness of the outstandingly beautiful human qualities of Soledad when she asks what he is thinking. Immediately but temporarily, Ismael convinces himself of the irrationality of his earlier decision in which he had resigned himself to only a tender, comforting friendship with Soledad. Thus, he begins a demonstrative endeavor to awaken her to the glorious life of happiness he could provide her. He figuratively tells her to lift her eyes, to look to some horizon of hope. As Soledad looks nostalgically over the countryside, Ismael recognizes her unspoken desire to return to her own country, but her thoughts are focused on the impossibility of such a trip. Judging her resistance, at this time, to be weakest, that is, her resistance to reject a proposal of another life, one of happiness, Ismael begins to elaborate, somewhat incoherently but vehemently, on other remote places where a world of pleasures await her.

The initial effect of his beautifully expressed ideas, proposing liberation from her heartache, is encouraging. She listens attentively, almost eagerly, ". . .con muda sorpresa, zozobrante en los ojos un

³⁴Ibid., p. 709,

fulgor de esperanza, compartiendo la obsesión de aquella línea libertadora que se abriría en un primer viaje."³⁵ However, her inner conflict--between her desire to flee from her present life of suffering and the obligation she feels of remaining eternally faithful--becomes visible in her distressed facial expressions. Under the present circumstances, Ismael believes his own power of persuasion to be quite strong; consequently, he continues more vigorously than ever trying to win her confidence and, hopefully, her ultimate acceptance of his assistance. In all probability, Soledad would have surrendered to Ismael's impassioned temptation had it not been for the carelessly but fervently spoken words: "Yo soy para usted la Fortuna, la Libertad, el Amor. Soy el amor que no muere, el único, el fiel."³⁶

The temporary magnetic spell resulting from Ismael's illusory plan of salvation for Soledad is suddenly broken. Her ensuing remarks reveal the invincible power of the illusion of her love and the impossibility of ever sacrificing its memory for her own well being. The reply made by Soledad illustrates her inalterable determination to guard that lofty love: "¡No! ¡El amor, no! ¡No lo compartiremos nunca, jamás! Aunque usted me diera todo el mundo que habíamos de recorrer, y el oro, la alegría, la salud."³⁷ Furthermore, this categorical avowal destroys all hope for personal happiness that Ismael may have had.

During the concluding moments of this pathetic interview, Ismael experiences alternating sentiments of bitterness and compassion. At first, embittered by Soledad's ". . . sentencia fulminante contra su

³⁵ Ibid., p. 710.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 711.

³⁷ Ibid.

dicha [la de Ismael], "³⁸ he loses all composure and begins to disparage rather caustically her absurd loyalty and her concept of dignity. He even goes as far as to imply the probable pleasures that her husband is enjoying with another woman. Although the jealousy aroused by this implication is almost intolerable for Soledad, she manages to whisper that she still and will always love her husband, regardless of the futility of that love. Skeptical of ever effecting any appreciable change in Soledad's persistence, Ismael feels remorseful for his latest unpremeditated remarks and immediately endeavors to find some means to comfort her. But his attempt is useless, for Soledad has no family, children or friends to whom she can turn. In spite of the loneliness indicated by this fact, she does not appear frightened; on the contrary, she seems quite courageous and proud when she says, "Me queda el corazón."³⁹ Upon saying this, she begins to exhibit that involuntary, faraway, searching stare which is so exasperating and disturbing to Ismael. Because of the reappearance of his hostility and bitterness, caused by the invisible presence del otro (which he detects in her detached expression), it is understandable that he should cruelly say: "¡Un corazón solitario!"⁴⁰

The total significance of these words, as perceived by Soledad, followed by another strongly spoken speech by Ismael--implying the inevitable and irreversible life of loneliness and sadness, one without love--produces an uncontrollable seizure in Soledad. Another factor contributing to her fit of delirium is revealed in the words she speaks only seconds before her emotional outburst. Unable to cope with the reality of her situation, as was intimated by Ismael, she replies to him,

³⁸ Ibid., p. 712.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

expressing the illusion of her husband's love and need for her, and her own undying passion and limitless pardon for him:

El [su esposo] siempre está en mí, puesto que yo estoy siempre con él. . . . me necesita, me busca, me llama, en medio de su vergüenza; y yo acudo, le recibo, con todas las palpitaciones de mi carne, con todo mi llanto, con todo mi deseo, con todo mi perdón; en cada instante que cae sobre mí, en cada pulso de mí inteligencia, por encima de las injurias, de la inquietud y del mal.⁴¹

The fundamental reason for this impassioned assertion is clear; feeling the lofty, idealistic conception of her love threatened by the reality expressed in Ismael's words, she exerts a revitalized endeavor to guard and protect her illusion. Her obviously unbreakable fixation on her illusory life of love with her husband results in the succeeding irrational, psychosomatic swoon. Oblivious to Ismael and everything surrounding her, she turns toward the sun, which she addresses as her husband, and reacts and speaks in an emotionally uncontrolled manner analogous to that of a passionate love scene.

Only moments later, having recuperated from her amorously convulsive seizure, Soledad exhibits an extremely composed state. Due to the intensity of the passionate emotions she has just experienced, it is evident that she feels a vigorously renewed dedication to her illusion which, in consequence, requires the ultimate dissolution of her relationship with Ismael. Although her sentiments for him are strong, her obsession with fidelity is more powerful. The extent to which she so ardently desires to experience the joy and the pain resulting from the memory of her love is described by the author in the following passage:

. . . pero quiere vivir la independencia de su desgracia y dejarse raptar por las convulsiones espirituales que él mismo

⁴¹ Ibid.

[Ismael] provoca, y que constituyen para ella una vida interior poblada de recuerdos indulgentes, de cándidas ternuras, de sacrificios ardorosos; un estado de ímpetu y beatitud donde se mezclan los más finos brotes de la sensualidad y la imperecedora consagración.⁴²

The initial shock that seizes Ismael while witnessing Soledad's incredible show of passion is followed by sentiments of compassion and repentance. All his previous ill feelings seem to be abolished because of the peerless, incurable love that he sees in Soledad. Due to the guilt he feels for having attempted to intrude and alter her love, he begs her forgiveness and swears never to disturb her again with his own designs but that his love for her will be pure and unspoken. This noble gesture of repentance and reaffirmation of continued love is graciously accepted by Soledad.

During the next few days Soledad remains in her room, physically and mentally exhausted, totally isolated from everyone. Her increased despair, grief and general weakness indicate that she has willfully and completely surrendered herself to the torment of her memories, refusing any help whatsoever, medical or otherwise. Her self-imposed isolation and the rapid deterioration in her condition are distressing to Ismael. Perceiving the total absence of her will to live, he feels compelled to interrupt her apparent trance, preparatory for her acceptance of death. In spite of the sincerity of his previous promise to desist from intervening in her affairs, he cannot ignore the injustice that would follow her unnecessary, premature death. Thus, with renewed vigor, he attempts to avert the inevitable tragedy that would result from her increased concentration on her painful memories. Recognizing the vital necessity of presenting some noble goal which might inspire her with a will to live, Ismael relates to her his own resolution to become a more virtuous man--a resolution which results from his having known her.

⁴²Ibid., p. 713.

In order to effect such a transition in himself, he emphasizes the benefit that would be derived from her understanding, compassion and friendship. The nobility of Ismael's intention--to transform his misfortune (of being denied a life with Soledad) into virtue--is appealing to Soledad. Comprehending fully his difficulty of sublimating his romantic feelings into actions of spiritual adoration, it is understandable that Soledad should declare the following oath: "¡Le juro a usted que haré todo lo posible por vivir!"⁴³

Their concerted effort to provide a mutually stimulating and alleviating relationship results in a few more meetings prior to Soledad's final departure. The evasion of intimate anxieties is essential in order for them to obtain the desired goal of each--freedom from the tortures of incessant memories on the part of Soledad, and self-sacrifice and noble sublimation on the part of Ismael. For this reason, their conversations appear superficial and trivial. Unfortunately, their desperate endeavor is inefficacious for Soledad, for she becomes more mentally detached and preoccupied.

During the last visit that Ismael makes to Soledad, it is obvious that she is suffering an irreversible depression and resignation. With the beauty of nature dying around her, indicating the approach of winter, it seems illogical that she should remain in Woltersdorf. Ismael advises her to seek another place, more pleasant and conducive to lifting her spirits. However, seeing her ". . . más envuelta que nunca en la noche de su corazón, . . ." ⁴⁴ he realizes that death is the only state capable of extinguishing her grief and suffering. In the closing moments of this brief interview, Soledad expresses some rather incoherent thoughts,

⁴³ Ibid., p. 718.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 724.

among which is ". . . la [congoja] de vivir . . . que es nueva cada día."⁴⁵ Upon hearing Ismael beg her not to leave such a bitter, mournful impression, she tries to exhibit a more composed attitude. Then, she concludes their conversation by saying that she will need to be alone tomorrow to attend to a few personal matters. Attempting to soothe the visible disturbance she has caused Ismael, she says, "Después nos veremos. Siempre amigos, ¿verdad?"⁴⁶ What she does not relate to him, however, is her intention to leave him and everything at Woltersdorf.

The next day Soledad, assisted by Maybach, departs for a more secluded place, without any word of farewell to Ismael. She has decisively broken her bond of friendship with him--a friendship which was in some respects dangerous, for it brought her moments of tenderness and spiritual comfort. The unselfish reason for her leaving Ismael and, consequently, dissolving their friendship, is revealed in her thoughts as she prepares to leave:

. . . no quería lastimar al buen caballero enamorado.
Encontraba una compañía y hasta un recurso espiritual en la adoración de él, y temía entregarse a la costumbre de hacerle sufrir y no servirle de consuelo.⁴⁷

Her departure, however, may be viewed in a different way. It may be considered as the fulfillment of one more personal sacrifice in her effort to glorify her fidelity. By dissolving this friendship, she destroys the only possibility and hope for a life of happiness. Her appearance and emotional state at this time are unlike those exhibited by her the previous night. Upon confronting the remainder of her life, although she is "envuelta como en un sudario en el Recuerdo,"⁴⁸ she does not

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 725.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 726.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

appear dejected, exhausted or bitter. On the contrary, she seems spiritually and physically strengthened. The source of her new strength is derived from her renouncement of the compassionate help of others, in particular, that of Ismael. This reason for her revitalized will to continue her life of grief is described in the following passage:

. . . La total renuncia a los socorros ajenos engríe su ánimo y le crece en una libertad sin albedrío, con la ciega filosofía del amor que únicamente libera cuando aprisiona. Ha llegado a ese punto de inconcebible padecer que a veces tropieza con una forma sobrenatural de alegría; el sésamo divino.⁴⁹

The transitory way in which she views the remainder of her life is seen in her decision to go to a more isolated place to experience more intensely the grief of her love and in her renouncement of anyone's help to alleviate her pain. Believing that only death can bring her the much needed relief, she resigns herself to a final period of solitude, in which she can nobly and courageously endure the spiritual torment of her haunting memories. Her resignation to such a fate will enable her to achieve her goal of untarnished fidelity; furthermore, the suffering she has so painfully experienced will serve to absolve her of any guilt or crime she may have committed which may have been partly responsible for her husband's desertion.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The three preceding chapters have dealt with plot summaries and developmental analyses of La esfinge maragata, El metal de los muertos and El Cáliz rojo, respectively. It is the intent of this chapter to present a comparison of the protagonists of these works, with particular emphasis on the differences and similarities in social, environmental and circumstantial elements which have produced essentially the same agonies, desires, personality traits, and attitudes in these women. Strong parallelism is apparent in Mariflor, Aurora and Soledad, but each demonstrates certain basic contrasts as well. The salient characteristics exhibited by all of these women, although in differing degrees, are emotional sensitivity, tenderness, compassion, idealism, devotion, unselfishness, and a persistence in believing their romantic illusions.

Their need for love, affection and security in a meaningful, romantic relationship is developed in each from contrasting environmental backgrounds. Mariflor, having enjoyed a warm relationship with her parents during her early years, feels a great void when she is forced to live with her emotionally insensitive and poor relatives after the death of her mother. On the other hand, Aurora's craving for affection is due to the total absence of it in her childhood. No parallel to the early development of this need is found in Soledad. Although it is true that she suffers a lack of a similar emotional attachment, hers is the result of having experienced a deep love in marriage and now being denied that relationship.

At the time of the meeting between the leading male characters and the respective protagonists, the emotional states of the latter are

extremely sensitive. The reason for the anxiety felt by Mariflor and Soledad is basically the same; being in an unfamiliar place with strange people, they are uncertain of their future. However, there is an added factor in the case of Soledad, who although having willfully gone to Germany, does not know what to do with her life. The cause of Aurora's apprehension is somewhat different, for she knows the nature of the environment to which she has been forced to return. But it is the knowledge of its corruption that frightens her.

The initial behavior and ideas of Mariflor and Aurora in their romantic relationships with Rogelio and Gabriel, respectively, are strongly parallel. Perceiving these men in an idealistic way and recognizing in them a salvation from their present environment, they immediately begin to build beautiful illusions, whose primary goal is a life of happiness. Because of Soledad's past experience in love, it is necessary to discuss both of her relationships.

In the one with her husband, she herself revealed her total surrender to him and her illusions of happiness. Her relationship with Ismael as an acquaintance does not preclude a comparison with her similar reactions, for she reveals to him, as do Mariflor and Aurora, her past and present circumstances, but somewhat reluctantly.

The kind of love that is presented in the lives of these women is spiritual, idealistic and tender. In spite of the physical aspect manifested in Aurora's relationship with Gabriel, her love is essentially the same as that of Mariflor and Soledad. The latter, however, does demonstrate a passionate feeling that is not present in the others. This deep passion results from her unbreakable fixation and her desperate desire to keep her past love alive.

In the course of their pursuit of happiness, Mariflor and Soledad experience an inner conflict, which has no counterpart in Aurora. Basically, their psychological torment results from the two opposing

elements of personal desire and duty. Mariflor suffers from her self-imposed obligation to relieve the critical situation of her relatives-- a duty which, if fulfilled, would prevent the attainment of happiness with Rogelio. Soledad, whose desire for happiness is actually much weaker than that of Mariflor, is tormented by her obsession with fidelity to her husband and the desire to be liberated from the anguish it causes her. The intensity of Soledad's suffering, unlike that of Mariflor, is greater when she feels herself weakening to the temptation offered by Ismael. On the other hand, Mariflor's suffering is greatest when she feels her personal desire threatened by duty. Although there is no corresponding psychological conflict in the case of Aurora, she does experience similar anxieties when she feels her hope for happiness threatened by environmental and circumstantial forces.

One tendency shared by all three women is their persistence in believing their illusions and disregarding the cruel indications of their apparent abandonment. After becoming vaguely aware of this reality, each experiences despair and loneliness, but their resultant actions are different. Mariflor, although she has not heard from Rogelio in months, actually believes that he will eventually return to liberate her. She persists in this delusion until the very end when she receives the letter in which he admits his inconstancy. Aurora, instead of accepting Gabriel's apparent desertion, goes to find him after the birth of her child. The renewed strength evident in this action is derived, in part, from her desperate desire to legitimize her child. Soledad, unlike Mariflor or Soledad, counteracts her feelings of despair and loneliness by believing in her own irreplaceability and the indestructibility of her love.

The attitude toward the redemptive, consoling aspect of self-sacrifice and the ultimate reward of happiness and relief from present hardships is exhibited by each heroine. But only Aurora remains firm in her conviction of its value. Mariflor, becoming dissatisfied after a

period of charitable acts, feels a sense of rebellion against submission to toil. As she becomes more aware of the futility of her love for Rogelio, she enters another period of personal sacrifice and suffering, hoping that she will eventually be freed from her selfish desires. Her final attitude, however, is one of disappointment, for she still loves him, even after destroying the only material evidence of their relationship. The momentary sentiment of revenge felt by Soledad has no similarity in Aurora or Mariflor. Although she believes her suffering to be unjust and recognizes the possibility of an escape through an affectionate relationship with Ismael, she cannot succumb to such an ignoble feeling, which, in her view, would be personally degrading. Therefore, after a period of self-imposed isolation and meditation, she exhibits a superior attitude of pride resulting from her self-sacrificing actions, the last of which is the dissolution of her friendship with Ismael.

The motivation of honor behind the remarkable devotion exhibited by Soledad and Aurora has no parallel in Mariflor. Instead, her devotion results from her hope to attain her romantic illusion. Although honor is the essential reason for Soledad's and Aurora's devotion in their amorous attachments, the basic concept is different. Aurora remains faithful to Gabriel and pursues him for the sake of her daughter, who she hopes will eventually be legitimized. Soledad's honor, however, revolves around her obsession with her idealistic conception of fidelity.

The ultimate tragedy that occurs in the lives of these women, that is, their failure to attain the fulfillment of their hope, of attaining happiness, is primarily the result of the weakness of the respective male figures. Upon recognizing this failure, the heroines are alike in their attitude toward the remainder of their lives, regardless of the difference in their actions. Feeling no bitterness, only disillusionment and grief, the sole desire of each at this time is for death, which would be preferable to any other fate. The actions of Aurora and Soledad are similar, for

each, viewing her life in a very transitory way, resigns herself to a period of grief preparatory to death, after which, idealistically, she will be reunited with her spiritual love. Regardless of the difference in their respective environmental conditions, the end result will be the same. Mariflor, however, is not so fortunate, for she must accept the personally unfulfilling marriage to her cousin Antonio, in spite of her undying love for Rogelio.

It has been stated that the sadness, misfortunes, heartaches, disappointments, unfulfilled illusions, and grief represented in the lives of the women in the novels of Concha Espina are a reflection of her own tragedy in love, which accentuated her melancholy and unhappy disposition. Fría Lagoni, describing the authoress, said:

Vemos a Concha Espina feliz . . . pero muy poco tiempo. Pronto encontramos indignación y amargura en sus labios ante el sino malogrado de sus amores; y aunque trate de rechazar en el fondo secreto de su alma la hondura de su tragedia, siempre adivinamos en su cara cierta ansiedad y melancolía¹

The deep emotion with which her novels are written strongly supports their autobiographical significance.

¹Mauro Fría Lagoni, Concha Espina y sus críticos (Toulouse: Editorial Figarola Maurin, 1929), p. 91.



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