

## The Spiritual *Bildung* in Carmen Laforet and Mercedes Salisachs

Maria R. Rippon  
Furman University

At twenty-three years of age, Carmen Laforet won the first Premio Nadal with *Nada* in 1944. Nearly forty years later, Mercedes Salisachs, then sixty-seven, responded with *El volumen de la ausencia*, set contemporaneously in the Spain of the early 1980s with flashbacks in the first person to the Spain of the 1960s and 1970s. With this novel, Salisachs was the winner of a similar publishing house award: the Premio Ateneo de Sevilla.

The protagonists of both novels reside on Aribau Street in Barcelona and use the public sphere of the Old City to discover truths about themselves and their worlds.<sup>1</sup> Only two articles have been published that discuss the intertextuality of *Nada* and *El volumen de la ausencia*, neither of these articles is concerned with the texts as apprenticeship novels, or *Bildungsromane*.<sup>2</sup> Critical articles on Laforet's novels demonstrate a range of approaches: thematic, stylistic, structural, feminist, and developmental. These articles scaffold categorizations of Laforet as either radical feminist or social activist or as either a legionary of the *quinta columna* or (like her protagonist Andrea) one who observes and records and nothing more. Of interest here are the articles that judge *Nada* a (failed) female *Bildungsroman*<sup>3</sup> since this study expands the development of Andrea to include her subsequent formation in *La mujer nueva* as Paulina.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Alison N. Tatum-Davis authored an excellent article entitled "Carmen Laforet's *Nada*: Upward and Outward Bound in Barcelona" on the way in which the public spaces of *Nada* serve to develop the character of Andrea.

<sup>2</sup> Debra A. Castillo's "Mercedes Salisachs, Ideal Womanhood, and the Middlebrow Novel" and Elizabeth Espadas' "El amor en los tiempos de la transición española: Dos miradas." The former compares *Nada* and *El volumen de la ausencia* in a thematic manner as part of a meta-argument for studying Salisachs's "middlebrow" novels in general and towards identifying the ideal role of women in society. The latter compares Salisachs's *Adagio confidencial* (1973) and *El volumen de la ausencia* (1983), only briefly observing Salisachs's "homenaje" to and "re-escritura" of *Nada* with *El volumen de la ausencia* and providing no more than a cursory glance at the two works in question.

<sup>3</sup> Marsha S. Collins, Robert C. Spires, and Michael D. Thomas argue that Andrea develops in the course of *Nada*, while Ruth El Saffar, Barry Jordan, and José Ángel Sáinz gainsay such arguments. Among those who argue that Andrea develops in the course of the novel are Sara Schyfter and Juan Villegas Morales.

<sup>4</sup> Although it was the first book written and published, *Nada* figures as the second installment of Laforet's three novels of female development and her only novel written in the first person. Andrea tells her own story, but she does so with a "double vision" (B. G. Rogers's expression to describe the Proustian technique of

In this article, I will analyze how the spiritual development characteristic of Andrea in *Nada*, of Paulina in *La mujer nueva*, and of Ida in *El volumen de la ausencia* echo the type of interior and sporadic formation that was characteristic of the female *Bildungs* of the nineteenth century written in English. Although the way in which they develop mirrors a pattern established in the previous century, the place that they find after their awakening marks a departure from these earlier novels since death often truncates any further development for their precursors. Far from feeling limited, Ida and Paulina find their vocation to be a revelation both liberating and peaceful.

The genre of the *Bildungsroman* has generated much critical debate since Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* first burst upon the literary scene in 1795 and 1796. While translations for the term exist—"novel of formation" or "education," "the apprenticeship novel," "la novela de aprendizaje" or "de educación" being the most common translations in English and Spanish—, *Bildungsroman*, or the truncated *Bildung*, remain the preferred terms. They remain preferred for some, because they see the genre as a particularly German phenomenon,<sup>5</sup> and for others, because something is lost in the translation. Some even question whether the prototype, Goethe's work, constitutes a *Bildung* since the protagonist wanders from one adventure to another in the beginning of the novel like a picaresque hero and does not reflect on his experiences enough to be said to be developing through his interaction with the world around him (Miles 981). So the debate rages as to whether the term is too broad (all novels could be considered *Bildungs*) or too narrow (only the German ones qualify): whether the protagonist has to accept the values of his bourgeois society or whether he (or *she*) can reject them whether the form is static in nature or can change; and whether, if the form changes, it must have a new name. Twentieth-century critics, following in the weighty footsteps of Bakhtin, have emphasized the way in which the genre differs from the confessional or autobiographical novels in that we not only witness the psychological development of the hero, but we view this development against the backdrop of changing historical circumstances: the hero emerges "along with the world" (23; emphasis in original). In the transition between epochs, the hero is forced to become a new man. Although this may be true of a male protagonist, what of the heroine in the transition from the Spanish Civil War to the Franco dictatorship and from the dictatorship to the constitutional monarchy?

---

having a subjective hero who is also the objective narrator [108]). She sees at times with the character Andrea and at times with the more mature narrator Andrea, which has confounded critics both in terms of proper narratological terminology and in interpreting judgments made in the novel. In addition, like the observer that she is, Andrea sees without great authority and with many gaps (both diegetically and extradiegetically). At least some of these gaps can be filled by reading Laforet's three novels of female development as though they were about a single protagonist: Marta, the teenager of Grand Canary Island in *La isla y los demonios*, develops into Andrea, the university student of *Nada*, who develops into the married mother of Miguel in *La mujer nueva*.

<sup>5</sup> Though the critics are not specified, David H. Miles declares his "chief purpose" with "The Pícaro's Journey to the Confessional" to be "to demystify some of the more arch German critics who would make the *Bildungsroman* an exclusively German genre" (Hirsch Gottfried and Miles 123: response to Marianne Hirsch Gottfried in the *PMLA* forum of January 1976). Tobias Boes, in his introduction to "On the Nature of the *Bildungsroman*" (1819), the Karl Morgenstern lecture credited with the first public use of the term, notes the way in which the classification *Bildungsroman* is fiercely debated "in the more secluded world of academic German departments" (647).

Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland in *The Voyage In* (1983) identify two patterns in female *Bildungsromane*: (1) that of apprenticeship, which is essentially chronological and most like the male *Bildungs* in that the protagonists show nearly continuous progression from childhood to maturity, and (2) that of the awakening (11). In the latter, the development of female protagonists “is delayed by inadequate education until adulthood” (11): their progress begins after the disillusionment of the “happily ever after” of marriage, occurs gradually, and is effected through “epiphanic moments,” or “significant changes” and “flashes of recognition” (12). As the authors note in their introduction, “Because it frequently portrays a break not from parental but from marital authority, the novel of awakening is often a novel of adultery” (12). Male protagonists develop both internally and externally: internally through ever-greater self-knowledge and externally through overcoming challenges to attain greater social status and recognition. In the female *Bildung* of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, the options for women were clearly defined; therefore, the development remained an internal phenomenon. As Claire Marrone notes, the male *Bildung*, characterized by a young protagonist whose wanderings catalyze his maturation and lead to his becoming a productive member of society, “is often replaced by learning through interpersonal relationships, and progress measured through success in the domestic sphere” (336). In the social context of Francoist Spain, for example, women needed their husbands’ permission to work. Divorce was illegal, and women could not serve on juries or hold public office. Salisachs wrote *El volumen de la ausencia* as the new *ley de divorcio* took effect in 1981, and her novel deals with the social stigmas associated with female infidelity and homosexuality. Despite greater freedoms legally, women were still very constrained socially until the end of the century, and for a conservative Catholic like Salisachs, they were constrained morally indefinitely. The female *Bildung*, thus, was necessarily a spiritual *Bildung* effected later in life and through flashes of inspiration.

If one accepts Marianne Hirsch’s identification of the typical pattern of the male *Bildung* as “separation, autonomy, [and] social involvement” (37), two of the three elements in Laforet’s *Andrea* remain indeterminate. This has led to various articles on whether *Nada* should be read as a *Bildungs* or not. However, if *Nada* is taken as the second book in a trilogy of female development that includes *La isla y los demonios*, *Nada*, and *La mujer nueva* (yes, written out-of-order with no intention to be read as such),<sup>6</sup> then the development does become more inner and spiritual, as that of Goethe’s *Beautiful Soul*, *Maggie Tulliver*, *Effi Briest*, and *Edna Pontellier* (protagonists discussed by Hirsch who

---

<sup>6</sup> Joaquín de Entrambasaguas, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Inmaculada de la Fuente, and Mark P. Del Mastro (“Psychosocial Development”) are among those who have written of the autobiographical nature of Laforet’s novels. Roberta Johnson, Agustín Cerezales, and De la Fuente have all written authoritative biographies of Carmen Laforet that describe her youth and adolescence on Grand Canary Island, her move to Barcelona when she was eighteen years old in 1939 to study literature at the university, her subsequent relocation to Madrid to study law, and her mystical experience in 1951 that led to a seven-year period of religious zeal and self-abnegation. Though Laforet first novelized her most recent experiences at the university in Barcelona living in her grandmother’s house in a city reeling from the Civil War, she later mined her adolescence for inspiration for *La isla y los demonios* (1952) and her religious experience on a street in Madrid in 1951 for *La mujer nueva* (1955). It is due to the overt autobiographical nature of these three novels and the seamless progression from adolescent to young adult to mature mother that I link the development of these three protagonists into one.

chart an inner, spiritual development without any corresponding social involvement or autonomy). While male protagonists (like Joyce's Stephen Dedalus and even Laforet's own Martín in *La insolación*) of *Künstlerroman* capitalize on their isolation and inner development to forge artistic identities, Paulina and Ida return to husbands with insipid, mundane souls, foregoing the realization of their selves in society through art or with lovers (who are also artists).<sup>7</sup> Nor do they feel limited in their renunciation of *true love* and the resumption of the socially acceptable roles of wife and mother in what are distasteful physical spaces to them. Their outward conformity comes only after their spiritual awakening and inward conformity. They do not maintain an inner dream life, as do some of the protagonists studied by Susan J. Rosowski for her contribution to *The Voyage In*: such dreams dissipate with their awakenings to metaphysical truths. Just as Goethe's Beautiful Soul "takes her growth to the only fulfillment possible, the mystical fusion with God" (Hirsch 29), so, too, do Ida and Paulina return to family, tradition, and God through a deliberate renunciation of worldly pleasures: a manifestation of their spiritual growth in the course of the novels.

Both *Nada* and *El volumen de la ausencia* follow a circular structure—a proposition that supports the argument of those who believe that *Nada* constitutes a failed female *Bildung*. *Nada* begins and ends with a journey undertaken by a young protagonist full of illusions regarding the liberation afforded her through her new beginning. *El volumen de la ausencia* begins with a pilgrimage through the streets of Barcelona to the abode of protagonist's former lover and ends with her hailing a taxi to return to her husband Daniel. Ida's outward journey triggers memories that catalyze the spiritual enlightenment she gains through her pilgrimage along the streets of the Old City. Unlike protagonists of the nineteenth-century, female *Bildung* who try to "return to origins" to their parents and their idyllic childhoods before they were married (Hirsch 26), Ida, like Paulina in Laforet's last novel of female formation, returns to her husband, the cold fish from whom the nineteenth-century counterparts are fleeing. The closed circle of zero, of nothing (*nada*), limits development in the traditional manner, but due to external limitations, Ida and Andrea-Paulina<sup>8</sup> chart an internal, spiritual growth that allows them to accept the outward stasis of their social situations peacefully.

Salisachs's Andrea is a character that conflates Laforet's Andrea and Ena since she has the egoism of Andrea, Andrea's desire to advance her social status, the beauty and manipulative nature of Ena, and Ena's attraction for and attractiveness to older men. This Andrea is not, however, the protagonist of Salisachs's "homenaje." Instead, the mother of

---

<sup>7</sup> Neither Paulina nor Ida express any tendencies towards an artistic vocation, but both are affected by art in the form of architecture, books, and paintings. In *La isla y los demonios*, Marta (the adolescent Andrea and Paulina), has pretensions of writing. She keeps a journal in which she writes legends of the island, but part of her maturation process is that she must break with the past and burn her journal in order to enter the next phase of her life. Is it only a break with fantasy, with a certain genre of writing, or is it meant to be a break with the vocation of writing itself? Pérez Firmat suggests the latter.

<sup>8</sup> The hyphenated name for two protagonists was suggested by my reading of Del Mastro's "Deception through Narrative Structure and Female Adolescent Development in Laforet's *Nada* and *La isla y los demonios*" wherein Del Mastro emphasizes the singular nature of the two protagonists by referring to them, at times, as "Marta-Andrea" or "Andrea-Marta" (51). Entrambasaguas was the first to hyphenate the names as he reviewed *La isla y los demonios* in the year it was published: 1952 (238). De la Fuente also writes of "Marta-Andrea" in her *Mujeres de la posguerra*.

Andrea, Ida, is the protagonist: a fifty-year-old mother of three who is unhappily married to a pretentious, unfaithful boor. Ida both focalizes the sections of third-person narration and narrates, in the first person, the last twenty years of her life to her former lover Juan with whom she plans to reunite. Ida's other children, Rodolfo and Jacobo, do more to teach her about suffering, desire, acceptance, and renunciation than to mirror any characters from *Nada*. There are, however, more neat parallels in the characters of the grandmother of Laforet's Andrea and the mother of Ida (neither of which suitably has a proper name given their self-effacing natures), in the pets—Trueno, Román's dog (and Antonia's imagined issue with Román), and Hipo Jacobo's dog (an amusing blip or *hiccup* compared to the ominous dark power of "Thunder")—and in the theme of art in each. In *Nada*, Andrea's circle of Bohemian friends (composed of her uncles Román and Juan, Margarita, the mother of Ena, and Andrea herself), all produce forms of art while, in *El volumen de la ausencia*, Ida works for an art gallery through which she meets the exiled artist Juan. Her husband Daniel writes imitative novels: inauthentic art like that of Andrea's Bohemian circle in *Nada*.<sup>9</sup>

The awakening, really religious conversion, or reversion of the protagonist Paulina in Laforet's last novel of female development parallels the formation of Ida in *El volumen de la ausencia*, which, in turn, reflects the typical female *Bildungs* of nineteenth-century literature in its inner, spiritual nature. Readers might expect the protagonists of *Nada* and *El volumen de la ausencia* to be at different stages of development: Andrea is nearly twenty and Ida is fifty. Yet, both begin as naïve, passive creatures. Andrea has been educated in a convent school and raised in protective family situations that controlled her movements outside the home. She takes to reading, likely romantic literature given her self-acknowledged "carga de sentimentalismo" and "desbocado romanticismo" (*Nada* 38, 107), self-absorption, and a propensity for falling into psychosomatic, feverish deliriums in order to avoid coping with unpleasant situations in her milieu. In the case of Ida, her awakening has been delayed by her pursuit of the fairy tale of marriage, children, and a "happily ever after." She will learn about herself and her place in the world as she walks from her doctor's office to Juan's studio at the port: the simultaneous action of the novel. Despite arguments to the contrary,<sup>10</sup> Andrea also develops in the course of the novel as she learns that appearances can be deceiving, that life rarely imitates books and movies, and that an authentic self can only be forged, paradoxically, through connection with others. *El volumen de la ausencia* and *La mujer nueva* demonstrate that the mere act of being connected is not enough: the key to the spiritual peace of Ida and Paulina lies in choosing to return to family rather than choosing to resume illicit connections with former lovers.

### **Laforet's *Nada***

Part I of *Nada* is undoubtedly the darkest of this novel, both literally and figuratively. Andrea is pure ego, Angustias controls her movements, and Román begins to control her mind and spirit. As yet, she has created no essence. Collins classifies *Nada* as an existential

---

<sup>9</sup> Salisachs's authoritative narrator tells us that Daniel's second book to be published is "una mezcla nauseabunda de estilos copiados . . . [.] donde la magia de García Márquez se unía a la salvaje mítica de Caballero Bonald, a las rebeldías sistemáticas de Scorza y a las audacias literarias de Rulfo" (*El volumen* 199). As Castillo puts it, Daniel "is at every level the personification of modern banality" (118).

<sup>10</sup> Those who argue against Andrea's development include El Saffar, Jordan, and Sáinz.

novel, because it “deals primarily with man’s alienation, disillusionment, and search for identity,” and because it focuses on ontological concerns, “specifically on the challenge of forging one’s being in the modern world” (298). Thomas sees the preoccupation with the self in *Nada* as typical of the Spanish novel of the 1940s and “not unusual after a civil war in which individuals were polarized into one of two collective identities” (74). Andrea is aware of her egoism, but despite the maturation that does take place, Andrea establishes only a tenuous connection to those around her in the course of the novel. At the conclusion of Part I of the novel, she expresses indifference to Angustias’ departure and confesses her pleasure at having the freedom now to pursue her whims: “. . . el único deseo de mi vida ha sido que me dejen en paz hacer mi capricho. . . . En los demás no pensaba, en Angustias, no pensaba: sólo en mí” (101). Part II ends with a crescendo of this egoism that Andrea develops in the course of Part I.

As she walks the streets after the disillusionment of Pons’ party, drowning in self-pity, Andrea experiences an epiphany: “En realidad, mi pena de chiquilla desilusionada no merecía tanto aparato. Había leído rápidamente una hoja de mi vida que no valía la pena de recordar más. A mi lado, dolores más grandes me habían dejado indiferente hasta la burla...” (208). She realizes she has had no compassion for the sufferings of those around her and that her disillusionment over her debut in high society did not deserve the tears she never shed for more material suffering or psychological torment. Alicia G. Andreu astutely notes that the “exaltación del yo” that we have in *Nada* is really a vestige of the Romantic rhetoric that characterizes Andrea’s discourse: “El lenguaje de Andrea, proveniente del texto romántico se distingue por ser extremo, exagerado. Imperan el sentimentalismo, la subjetividad, [sic] y la exaltación del yo” (599). In the mirror scene in *El volumen de la ausencia* that reflects Laforet’s, Salisachs’s intrusive narrator tells us that “Más que un fragmento de la ciudad, lo que está contemplando Ida Sierra es un conjunto de mentiras movidas por resortes en clave de ficción. Un mundo inmenso de pequeños ‘yoes’ solitarios impulsados por la prisa o por la indolencia hacia unas metas que no existen” (115). Both novels prove to be critical of the solitary “yo.” In *El volumen de la ausencia* that criticism extends to a consumerism that was not present during the *autarquía* of the first decade of the Franco regime.

When familiar and social bonds fail her, Andrea unconsciously adopts one of the few recourses available to female protagonists: she flees. As Marta, she flees Grand Canary Island at the end of *La isla y los demonios*. As Andrea, she flees Barcelona for Madrid at the end of *Nada*. As Paulina, she flees Villa de Roble (a small, Galician village) for Madrid in *La mujer nueva*. Fernando Barroso, in “La mujer nueva en Carmen Laforet,” notes that “La mujer huye, pero es para encontrarse a sí misma” (255). Román, when he sees Andrea dressed for Pons’ party says to her, “Tú, como las mujeres todas de esta casa, huyes” (*Nada* 201). In effect, this is exactly what Andrea does in the end of the novel; what Ida does at the opening of *El volumen de la ausencia* when she leaves the doctor’s office with her terminal diagnosis and heads for Juan’s apartment, thus fleeing from Daniel; and what Paulina does when she flees from Eulogio in the opening of *La mujer nueva*. Only in the case of Andrea is the effectiveness of her flight questionable since the development of Andrea remains nebulous in *Nada* given the many narrative gaps.

It is in Part II that Andrea anxiously considers how “los elementos de mi vida aparecían y se disolvían para siempre apenas empezaba a considerarlos como inmutables” (142). The

protagonist of Salisachs's most popular novel, *La gangrena*, similarly muses on the inconstancy of all he once thought immutable:

Y supe que la mayoría de las bases que nos predicaban [authority figures like Carlos' mother, his uncle Rodolfo, and Fr. Celestino] eran endeble, capaces de hundirse al menor soplo. No era prudente confiar en ellas. Se corría el riesgo de naufragar en desilusiones. Nada debía de ser sagrado e inamovible: nada; ni el amor materno, ni la amistad, ni la pureza de alma. Algo superior a todo ello acababa por romper, y quemar, la parte bella de la vida. (25)

Like Andrea, Carlos, the protagonist of this novel, examines himself in the mirror and fails to recognize himself, and like Andrea, he realizes that the maturation process entails disillusionment and skepticism: Carlos thinks, "Efectivamente, era ya un hombre. Un hombre con todos los atributos de los demás: descreído, desilusionado y escéptico" (39). As the example of Andrea demonstrates, it is not only men who are "descreído[s], desilusionado[s] y escéptico[s]." She, too, learns to distrust love (romantic, in her case), friendship (due to her abandonment by Ena), and the semblance of purity (of Angustias in joining a convent).

Though it is recounted before, it is the night after Pons' party that Andrea examines herself in the mirror in a passage written with the effect of *ostranenie* ("defamiliarization"). Neither she nor her readers are certain who is this "larga sombra blanca," this "espectro" in Angustias' mirror, until she says, "Al fin alcancé a ver mi propia cara desdibujada sobre el camisón de hilo" (198). Her features seem indefinable and she concludes, "De todas maneras, yo misma, Andrea, estaba viviendo entre las sombras y las pasiones que me rodeaban. A veces llegaba a dudarle" (199). Though she has learned much that day in recognizing her egotism and through her conversation with Margarita, Ena's mother, Andrea continues to feel that others are living while she is observing them live. Marta, the protagonist of *La isla y los demonios*, burns her journals in the end, in part so that she can stop writing about life and start to live it. In her own mind, at least, Andrea has still not reached this milestone. Only Paulina, after reuniting with her husband Eulogio at the conclusion of *La mujer nueva*, feels she finally has.

Part II of *Nada* concludes with Andrea's epiphany that she has been indifferent to the suffering of those around her; Part III opens with a further revelation that, when one can forget about oneself, one can find peace. As Andrea sits down to listen to Margarita's story, we read at the end of the first paragraph of this section, "Me olvidé de mí y al fin encontré la paz" (213). This Schopenhauerian "quieting of the will" rather than the Nietzschean will to power holds the secret to a peaceful life. Once the ego is quieted, connections can be formed that are essential to the creation of an authentic self. Margarita's tale demonstrates this point precisely: her daughter Ena, like Ida's son Jacobo, was never desired, yet just as Jacobo became the most desired, the existence of Ena has helped create the identity of Margarita, her mother. "¡Ha sido un trabajo tan delicado, callado y profundo entre las dos!" Margarita says, and it was a work that began with her opening herself "a los demás," beginning with her husband Luis, for whom she felt no romantic love. Her narratee, Andrea, understands "este idioma de sangre, dolor y creación que empieza con la misma sustancia física cuando se es mujer" (223). There are those, as Collins notes, who impede the development of Andrea's authentic self (Angustias and Román), but there are others, like Gloria, Margarita, and Ena who contribute to the development of Andrea's "new

identity” with “a mature capacity for love, forgiveness, and understanding” (307). Collins points to Andrea’s intervention in the argument between Ena and Román near the novel’s conclusion as the point at which “Andrea’s new identity as a person capable of action emerges” (307)—capable of acting out of love for another.

One of the most commented passages in *Nada* and one that would seem to support character entropy rather than character development is the following (focalized through Andrea, the implicit author, since the preceding comments of Andrea the character are in the form of a quoted monologue):

“Si aquella noche —pensaba yo— se hubiera acabado el mundo o se hubiera muerto uno de ellos [Juan o Gloria], su historia hubiera quedado completamente cerrada y bella como un círculo.” *Así suele suceder en las novelas, en las películas, pero no en la vida... Me estaba dando cuenta yo, por primera vez, de que todo sigue, se hace gris, se arruina viviendo. De que no hay final en nuestra historia hasta que llega la muerte y el cuerpo se deshace...* (233; emphasis added).<sup>11</sup>

Such pessimism belies the hopefulness of the ending, yet it demonstrates maturation in the character Andrea, who arrives in Barcelona with all the illusions she was to have burned with her journals on Grand Canary Island, still reading life like a novel and expecting more romanticism out of it than God put in it.<sup>12</sup> Thomas, one who sees Andrea “transformed from an unrealistic dreamer, an unassertive, unforgiving, self-centered child, into a hopeful, compassionate, decisive adult” (72), interprets the section in italics as being in the mind of the character Andrea and not as being the voice and vision of the mature Andrea. He asserts that this reaction does nothing more than show “a reluctance on Andrea’s part to be too hopeful, a normal response to recent disillusionments, but she will eventually achieve equilibrium in her emotions” (69). In a somewhat similar vein, Andrew A. Anderson points out that Andrea, like Emma Bovary, has imbibed romantic ideals through her reading of literature, which has substituted any real experience of the world given her education in a convent school. Anderson identifies her reflection here on Gloria and Juan’s story as a “notable moment of inflection” wherein she learns “that life is not like literature or film, that life just goes on (until death finally extinguishes it)” (24). Spires describes her transformation thus: “. . . de una muchacha ilusa, que se deja engañar tan fácilmente, en una mujer realista que acepta con equidad el carácter paradójico del ser humano” (32). Emphasizing that negative signs always indicates something, Spires argues that the negations of the last chapter of *Nada* negate Andrea’s illusions and affirm her maturity. Stephen M. Hart connects the disillusionment Andrea expresses here to her disillusionment

---

<sup>11</sup> This is the same sentiment expressed by Gloria when she tells her story to Andrea in Chapter 4 about Juan’s coming for her at the clinic after she has given birth and recalled by Andrea immediately before the passage just cited: “Era como el final de una película. Era como el final de todas las tristezas . . .” (233). Gloria’s actual words were: “Era ya como el final de una novela. Como el final de todas las tristezas,” and shortly thereafter, “Aquel momento fue como el final de una película” (51-52). Though not in Andrea’s recollection cited here, both the “novelas” and “películas” of Gloria’s narration are included in Andrea’s commentary.

<sup>12</sup> This was Willa Cather’s criticism of Emma Bovary and Edna Pontellier in her review of *The Awakening* published in the *Pittsburgh Leader* (July 8, 1899) under the pseudonym of “Silbert.” “Both women,” Cather writes, “belong to a class, not large, but forever clamoring in our ears, that demands more romance out of life than God put into it” (6).

with fairy tales like Cinderella and Hollywood movies—all connected with her preparations for or experiences at Pons' party, such as when she describes Pons' cousin as having “una sonrisa forzada de estrella de cine” and her wondering how she could be the protagonist “de tan ridícula escena” (17).

As mentioned before, El Saffar, Jordan, and Sáinz figure among those who argue against *Nada* as female *Bildungs*. El Saffar writes that the “character Andrea never loses her capacity for illusion, and leaves the novel, as she entered it, prepared to believe that the sordid and unhappy realities of her life are escapable” while the “author Andrea . . . presents the novel from a perspective that reveals an absence of hope for renewal and rejuvenation” (119). Jordan describes a passive Andrea who expresses ambivalence towards her so-called obstacles. She is fascinated, for example, by the house and its inhabitants of Aribau Street even as she feels oppressed by them. Rather than advancing, the plot of *Nada* takes readers inward and backwards as the main character “searches out origins” (111). “If this is a *Bildung* or development,” Jordan writes, “then it is a *Bildung* by negative example. Andrea learns how not to be; she learns what she must avoid” (115).<sup>13</sup> Sáinz echoes Jordan's sentiment in labeling *Nada* “la antítesis del *Bildungsroman*” (732). Sáinz emphasizes the difference between the opening and closing of the novel to demonstrate the failed formation: Andrea begins as an independent agent who travels alone to Barcelona, arriving unafraid and exuberant with her freedom in the middle of the night, while she leaves under the patriarchal protection of Ena's father. Sáinz concludes, “Así, lejos de presentar un final optimista, el texto expone más bien la única opción de la víctima en un ambiente totalitario. ¿Qué puede hacer una joven enamorada de la libertad deseosa de construir una identidad en un ambiente de totalitarismo consagrado? Pues, precisamente eso, nada” (732). Unquestionably, men had greater freedoms than women in twentieth-century Spanish society; nevertheless, women could and did develop inwardly. Though we readers of the twenty-first century may not like the roles they assumed, their process of formation (which is through great insights and much reflection and not subliminal or institutional indoctrination) induced them to accept the roles that society had prepared for them.

While there is stasis (Juan continues to beat Gloria, Gloria continues to sell items from the apartment for money, and the grandmother continues to pray to the Virgin that this last will go unnoticed) or even the undeniable regression described by Sáinz, there are also signs of rejuvenation in the final chapter of *Nada*: Román is dead, Antonia disappears with Trueno, there is food in abundance at Andrea's farewell dinner, during which Juan “parecía de buen humor” (273), and Andrea expresses love for Gloria and hope in her liberation as the new day dawns. With each end, there is “hope for a new beginning” (Thomas 72).

---

<sup>13</sup> Jordan characterizes the viewpoint of the “inner development” of Andrea as “*other*” than the view of the novel as a *Bildungsroman* and questions even such inner development (111; emphasis in original). In his argument against *Nada* as *Bildung*, Jordan emphasizes Andrea's passivity and the circularity of the novel's structure, which is dominated by “repetitions rather than progressions, a pattern of returns and reenactments of scenes already performed” (111). He seems to be unaware of the work of Abel, Hirsch, and Langland, which he never references, while he declares that the “modern versions of female *Bildung*” involves a protagonist “in a conscious, willed separation from male-defined norms” (108). This certainly does not define the novels in question here—novels which would be classified as “modern”—nor their nineteenth-century prototypes, and yet these are novels of female formation.

Certainly, Andrea leaves with the illusion that Madrid will be different. However, her illusions upon leaving Barcelona are not the same ones with which she came—further evidence of her maturation: “No tenía ahora las mismas ilusiones, pero aquella partida me emocionaba como una liberación” (275). As with her adolescent self (Marta in *La isla y los demonios*), Andrea has learned to divest herself of Emma Bovary’s rose-colored glasses, and to see life without romantic embellishments like those of a fairy tale or movie. They are not the legends of an island in *Nada*, but the legends of a family and of a happily-ever-after that must be exorcised. With greater self-awareness and maturity, Andrea leaves for Madrid cognizant that men who do not love you may still want to kiss you, that perception and memory are not to be trusted, and that connections to friends and family bear greater fruit than isolation and self-absorption. More telling for the possibilities of development for Andrea in Madrid is not that she must have the protection of a patriarchal figure, but whether she can create an authentic self in connection with others. Will she create an essence or will she float into middle age like Ida? Laforet never brings story time and narration time together in *Nada*, so we are left wondering whether Andrea ever finds her place in the world. The narrative act would suggest that she did, that her “ruin papel de espectadora” reaps rewards for her as a writer, as does her further development as Paulina in *La mujer nueva*. As Jordan astutely observes, “Andrea’s narrative has more to do with constituting a self prepared for self-denial and docility” (117)—precisely the path Paulina will choose in the end of *La mujer nueva*.

### Salisachs’s *El volumen de la ausencia*

In response to the novel about nothing that seems to leave its protagonist with nothing for which she searches, Salisachs has written *El volumen de la ausencia*: a novel that demonstrates not only that the absence of loved ones is a palpable presence, but that the absence of spiritual values in a materialistic, consumer-driven culture also oppresses with its absence and speaks volumes. Castillo identifies the “rather cynical rewriting of *Nada*” in *El volumen de la ausencia* thus: “Andrea, the beautiful, willful daughter [of Ida and Daniel] has (like her namesake in Laforet’s novel) cultivated the friendship of the richest girl in school with the entirely pragmatic objective of finding and seducing the richest possible man to support her intended lifestyle . . .” (121). There is no suggestion in *Nada* that Ena’s father and Andrea will commence a romantic involvement, yet there is no question in *El volumen de la ausencia* that Salisachs’s Andrea plans to marry her friend’s father, Mr. Carihueta, as soon as it becomes legal to do so. Her daughter’s adulterous relationship with a married man makes Ida confront her own extramarital affair with the married painter Juan. Until she meets Mrs. Carihueta, Ida feels that her affair and her daughter’s affair cannot be compared: her affair, clothed as it is in the veil of romantic love and representative of her break with “paternal” authority, passes for self-actualization, while her daughter’s pragmatic way of earning a living constitutes prostitution.<sup>14</sup> As Castillo notes, “At question, then, for Ida are not Andrea’s actions but Andrea’s motivations” (121).

---

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that—whatever the motivation at its inception—Andrea’s liaison with Mr. Carihueta supersedes the pragmatic and financial by the time Rodolfo is hospitalized for taking an overdose of sleeping pills. The consolatory embrace Andrea and Mr. Carihueta exchange indicates greater affection than Ida has at first assumed in her haste to distinguish her affair from that of her daughter’s.

It is Mrs. Carihuela, the offended wife, who lifts the veil and induces Ida to see herself as *the other woman*, “tan puta como su hija” (*El volumen* 179). In adopting the point of view of the long-suffering wife, Ida comes to see that the motivation for adultery is irrelevant—something Paulina also realizes in Laforet’s *La mujer nueva* when she must confess her sins to a priest: “Lo diferente del confesionario a la vida es que aquí se acaba el adorno. Paulina no podía explicar nada de lo que para ella había sido el amor de Antonio, después de una época de vacío absoluto, tristeza y enfermedad... No quedaba más que aquel esqueleto repugnante. En el fondo, la verdad” (121). The naked truth remains when “se acaba el adorno,” when self-serving justifications are out of place.

In the first-person narration of Ida, her home with Daniel on Aribau Street is “un almacén de fealdades” and a “mundo de mentiras” (21, 192). The suffocating atmosphere of *Nada* is echoed in the reflections of Ida with the image of a “losa pesante” that crushes Ida until she decides that she will leave the ugly, spent abode and live her final days with her former lover Juan (119). As she leaves the doctor’s office at 17:10, she is determined to “dar sentido a mis latidos”—a very existentialist proposition where she would determine the meaning of her existence, she would create her essence by giving meaning to her heartbeats. As Ida tells the doctor, “La gente no muere cuando el corazón deja de latir. La gente muere cuando los latidos no tienen sentido” (69). Ida thinks at this point that the meaning her life lacks can be found in living fully a romantic relationship with Juan, the obvious, though not only, absence that she feels. However, her journey through the streets of Barcelona opens her eyes to the reality of the immaterial and the fictions of materialism and romantic love.

Ida is a character who floats through life in a vegetative state, “finding refuge in a prolonged childhood” (Castillo 122). She is, like Andrea, inactive for all but the conclusion of the novel, when she chooses to return to her domestic servitude rather than risk disillusionment with her former lover Juan. Ida extrapolates from the changes in the city around her that her relationship with Juan could not remain unaltered. Juan claimed that they needed only to synchronize their watches in order to avoid the ravages of time, but Ida wonders whether synchronicity is ever possible and even whether there was anything unique about her experiences with Juan worth trying to preserve or recapture. As Emma Bovary learns, adultery can be just as boring as marriage. Perhaps Juan would have become another Daniel with time.

Castillo, noting the “repeated and unsubtle reference to Laforet’s key term [nada,]” perceives a play in the two words “Ida nada” that suggests both the “nothing” of *nada* and the third person present tense of the verb *nadar*: “If Laforet’s Andrea drowns in nothingness,” she writes, “Salisachs’s heroine floats in absence” (108, 110). Without defining the nature of Ida’s epiphany, Castillo notes that “the real, the true, the profound uncover themselves at last” to Ida, but she adds, “Certainly, it is difficult to imagine how Ida’s hard-won truth about herself will survive her return to the miserable Aribau apartment or her husband’s compulsive television watching, much less what form Ida’s new acceptance of her own agency might take” (123). Castillo fails to see that Ida’s “new acceptance of her own agency” is to fulfill her responsibilities as wife to Daniel and to practice love, even though she does not feel it, just as her mother preached: “Apréndelo ya de una vez: el amor a Dios raramente se siente. El amor a Dios se practica” (*El volumen* 261). Ida has been naïve, but in the end, she deliberately chooses to end her days with

Daniel and his mother in an ugly, oppressive apartment. Because she chooses to do so, she will not suffer. As Mr. Carihuela instructs her during the crisis with her son Rodolfo, "Piense que lo que de verdad nos induce a sufrir no es lo que solemos llamar catástrofe (sea del tipo que sea), sino la lucha que mantenemos para no admitirla" (251). Resignation is the key. In Schopenhaurian terms, she learns to quiet her will.

The peripety of the conclusion of *El volumen de la ausencia* results from several epiphanic moments in the course of Ida's walk to the port. Outside the diminutive garden facing the Bank of Bilbao, for instance, Ida gives her imagination free rein and acknowledges in a passage of interior monologue that "Lo real es lo que no se explica. Lo que jamás se anuncia [in contrast to the many billboards for beauty products or alcohol]: esa boca vacía de alimentos, ese corazón vacío de amor, esos ojos vacíos de compasión..." (136). Later, in the heart of the city, in the Plaza de Cataluña, Ida observes more evidence of the materialistic ideology that has infected everyone to the point that they have become like the symbols of death in Goya's Capricho *El sueño de la razón* (number 43): the clients in the "cervecerías" expound "ideologías materialistas, repetid[a]s hasta la saciedad, soñad[a]s por individualismos desencantados que luego se vuelven mayoría y acaban por producir monstruos como en los cuadros de Goya" (206-07). Just as the *burro*-teacher of the Goya Capricho entitled *¿Si sabrá más el discípulo?* (number 37) perpetuates the errors of his predecessors, or like the virus metaphor that follows, the "ideologías materialistas" expounded in bars pass like a contagion from one individual to another until they become the mindset of the majority—"[una] democracia morbosa" in the words of Ortega y Gasset. In order to cage these "monstruos," these harbingers of death, Salisachs suggests that her readers see with the eyes of imagination (like those of a novelist) beyond the material appearance of objects to the many invisible and transcendental realities that are even more real than the physical for Salisachs.<sup>15</sup>

The leitmotif of disease appears in the titles of two of Salisachs's novels (*La gangrena* and *Bacteria mutante*) and further extends the metaphor of the monsters of Goya's Capricho. As Ida witnesses all the tourists being vomited from taxis—"[l]os vehículos van vomitando turistas"—outside the President Hotel, she recalls Juan's words to her: "Todos somos tráfugos ignorantes, Ida; vamos por el mundo convalecientes de engaños y desengaños, odios y egoísmos, vanidades y torpezas, y lo que es peor: no sabemos por qué. Es como un virus que nos contamináramos los unos a los otros" (116). Unlike Daniel, Juan recalls the Jane Austen ideal of a husband who teaches his partner. While his viewpoint on synchronicity remains questionable, his concern for a convalescent humanity hampered by individual egos asserting their will to power is validated by the choice Ida makes in the end: one that ironically induces her to stay away from him. *El volumen de la ausencia* suggests that the *desertors* contaminated by the virus of Nietzschean will to power neglect their duty to love others in order to strive towards "unas metas que no existen," all the while hampered by the disillusionments, deceits, hatreds, and vanity of egoism, which force them to hobble along aimlessly (115). They are people who move around without being,

---

<sup>15</sup> The theme of fiction versus reality is one that appears in other Salisachs novels, such as in *La gangrena*, *Derribos*, and the conclusion of *Goodbye, España* (2009), where Salisachs writes, "Nada es verdaderamente real en las realidades humanas. Todo tiende a ser ficción. Todo se reviste de una importancia que no tiene y que, en cuanto se descuida, se convierte en aire" (345).

who have being but no essence, or who have spouses and children but no love. They are individualistic “yoes” imprisoned without knowing it by their feelings, desires, and assertion of the self.

Ida, despite the example and faith of her mother, never enters churches, not even on Sundays (154). As she passes the church of Sión at 18:30, she feels a “momento de alivio” and briefly reflects that, while most people who know they are dying think about God, she has only thought about Juan. Her thoughts then lead her to reflect on her gradual loss of faith and the practice thereof in order to seem normal, modern, and authentic. Mostly, she fears being a hypocrite if she practices something she does not feel, all the while engaging in an extramarital affair. In *La mujer nueva*, Paulina resolves the hypocritical label in her case by saying that believers like herself were not hypocrites to try to evangelize others even though they were not living ethically or in accord with Church teachings, because it was always possible that others could do what she and people like her lacked the strength to do despite their faith. When Ida does enter a church at 19:45, because it contains a crucifix that her mother liked to contemplate, she leaves even more determined to be with Juan since contemplating the crucifix only increases her sense of abandonment, as she imagines how abandoned Christ must have felt. Ironically, this place of prayer does nothing to feed her on her spiritual journey that leads to self-understanding, social criticism, and an appreciation for what is real. Time and memory effect more epiphanies for Ida than traditional houses of prayer. In contrast, for Paulina, it is time spent in a church at dawn with the example of an elderly couple renewing their marital vows that shows her the path she should take.

Salisachs chooses an epigraph for *El volumen de la ausencia* from the theologian and author of more than thirty-five monographs whom she considered the best Spanish author of the twentieth century and towards whom she had the greatest affinity: José María Cabodevilla (1928-2003). His *Consolación de la brevedad de la vida* (1982) was published as Salisachs composed *El volumen de la ausencia*, and the former's discussion of the movement of time is reflected in the near constant movement of Ida in the simultaneous narration of *El volumen de la ausencia* and in his conception of the *volume* of time. For Cabodevilla, time assumes volume as we consider all the possible lines of the past, present, and future at once.<sup>16</sup> Salisachs's novel attempts to do just that: to reflect on what was, what could have been, what is, and what should and never will be, all while her protagonist remains in constant motion. As Cabodevilla explains in *Consolación de la brevedad de la vida*, change is constant, but we cannot see change if we stare at ourselves for thirty minutes in the mirror; however, if we were to look at a picture from thirty years ago, we would note the change. Similarly, while Ida is in constant movement in the simultaneous narration of the novel, her reflections on her life with Daniel, her children, and Juan serve as the *artificial snapshots* described by Cabodevilla that freeze the constant motion of time that Ida experiences in order to examine the effect of time on her and her relationships.

Cabodevilla's refutation of a painting by Marc Chagall, *El río del tiempo*, also finds its way into *El volumen de la ausencia* as Ida realizes through her epiphanic moments that romantic love cannot withstand the ravages of time and cohabitation. Cabodevilla wishes that the sentiment expressed in Chagall's painting could be true, that the lovers would not

---

<sup>16</sup> Cabodevilla cites Oupensky in his discussion of the different dimensions of time here (149-50).

be carried away with everything else in “the river of time” (that is, objects considered dear to the painter). In an apologetic manner, Cabodevilla concludes his discussion of the painting by directly addressing the artist, saying “Querido Marc Chagall: Lo siento, porque su cuadro era tan hermoso, que merecía ser verdad. Lo siento pero también a los enamorados los arrastra inexorablemente el río del tiempo” (163). “[E]l amor doméstico,” because of the lack of obstacles and stimulation turns out to be much more difficult to sustain, given the “efectos devastadores de la rutina, la repetición y el desgaste,” than romantic love with all its uncertainties (Cabodevilla 161).

The epigraph from *Consolación de la brevedad de la vida* that graces the front matter of Salisachs's *El volumen de la ausencia* recalls the Schopenhauerian will to live that became the Nietzschean will to power: “¿Qué queda ya del célebre deseo de vivir, aquel deseo indefectible de seguir viviendo a toda costa?” (Cabodevilla 202). Ida's choice to return to Daniel in the end must seem to many readers the victory of the death instinct over the will to live. However, Ida has come to question the basis for desires that create longings that cannot be filled and the reality of a romantic love that could withstand the ravages of time and *convivencia*. The section in Cabodevilla that follows Salisachs's citation includes Cabodevilla's discussion of Freud's Thanatos and Eros with a refutation of his designation of the death instinct as superior to the drive to live, love, and create (Eros) by referring to the work of Erich Fromm, who demonstrated that the Thanatos was a pathology while the Eros belonged to biology. If the Eros functions properly, Thanatos does not function at all (Cabodevilla 203). Since desire proves unreliable, as Ida learns when she reflects that her unwanted son Jacobo “comenzaba ya a convertirse en el niño más deseable del mundo” (89), Ida heeds the direction of her mother and chooses to practice love. She cannot be sure that the intense longing (desire) that she feels to be with Juan can be trusted and reciprocated; moreover, the feeling of love is subject to the ruinous effects of time and routine. Only the practice of love can endure.

While the epigraph is from Cabodevilla, the dedication is “*A todos los que sufren ausencias; ese río de esperanzas inútiles, que nunca encuentra el cauce adecuado para llegar hasta el mar*” (5; italics in original). Although it is useless to hope for that which time has claimed, the suffering caused by broken connections is very real and palpable. Ida says in her narration to Juan, “El ser humano siempre ha necesitado compartir, Juan. Saberse istmo, no isla” (223). When Ida complains to her mother that the ignorant masses bother her, her mother tells her that she lacks “conciencia social. . . ; te falta comprender que todos dependemos de todos” (123), and she later remembers that her mother was want to say, “[N]o hay posibilidad de convivir sin anular el egoísmo” (267). From the very beginning of the novel, as she waits in the doctor's office, Ida intuits humanity's connectedness: the whole meaning of life for Ida is “sentirse esperado. Y esperar” (24). Ida has been waiting twelve years to be with Juan, her “istmo”: twelve years of waiting, rather than living, and disconnectedness rather than a “compartir continuo” (295). She feels no connection with Daniel, who does not listen to her and loses himself in the newspaper or television (when not with Marta), but Daniel also waits for her. At the end of her “peregrinaje” (293), she remembers that she has promised to rub his aching back when she returns from the doctor's office. Daniel will not ask about her “viaje muy largo” (293), he will only watch television and sleep until he is called for dinner, yet Ida chooses to follow her mother's advice and love him though she feels nothing for him.

Ida's previous renunciations of her lover for the sake of her children (first Andrea, then Rodolfo) cause her to feel "olvidada por mí misma, huida de mi propio yo, perdida para siempre de mis más íntimas individualidades" (176). Will this final renunciation be any different? Decidedly so, for her "peregrinaje" to the sea, to the port area from the Vía Layetana, awakens her to the reality of the effects of time on places and relationships. Moreover, she willingly chooses her own self-effacement rather than unconsciously adopting a social moré. Her choice to resume domestic servitude is that adopted by Paulina, as well, at the conclusion of *La mujer nueva*. Although Paulina has been searching for a more heroic "despojo," like the saints of old, she realizes that her renunciation of Antonio—something much more "anodino" than she expected—is the only path that can feed her spirit (286). She might have been happy, she acknowledges, with Antonio "a la manera humana," and she might have earned a reputation for being a saint and a charitable woman had she married Antonio "[p]ero su espíritu moriría al no ser alimentado por la verdad. Y al fin, todo pasaría. Y delante de Dios, y en lo hondo de su ser, su vida, en aquel caso, sería vacío y mentira y nada" (290). As Ida suggests with her meditation on the fiction of the material world, Paulina's reflection here likewise recalls the Christian nihilism expressed in the Book of Ecclesiastes that speaks of the vanity of all things under the sun since they shall all pass away.

While the story time of *Nada* occurs between two trips (from the Canary Islands to Barcelona and from Barcelona to Madrid), Salisachs's narrator tells us that Ida Sierra was not born to move in *circles* other than that of her home city. Her one trip—aside from this very important trip from her doctor's office to the portal of Juan's apartment building—will be death (293). Ida realizes in the final hour ("Hora 20.30") that "su llegada a la meta no es más que el remate de una fábula. Una tregua para una ilusión absurda. . . . Una especie de peregrinaje auténtico para compensar, de algún modo, los otros dos viajes soñados . . ." (293). In a metafictional sense, her arrival is the culmination ("remate") of the narrative ("fábula"); it affords the readers a break ("tregua") from the suspension of disbelief ("una ilusión absurda"). As with Laforet's titling her first foray into literature *Nada*, the metafictional nature of this line could suggest that this narration has been an absurdity, but this would belie the importance of the spiritual *Bildung* described therein.

Heterodiegetically, the "peregrinaje auténtico" has been "un viaje muy largo" of the spirit towards enlightenment, which compensates for the trips Ida never took with Juan to Nice and America due to her concern for the separate scandals in which her children were mired. Her soul takes an even more important, *authentic* journey toward self-discovery and self-actualization through paradoxical self-abnegation, which cannot be equated to "antifeminismo radical" or resignation towards domestic imprisonment.<sup>17</sup> Both Paulina and Ida work outside the home: Paulina as a teacher and Ida as an assistant in an art gallery. Neither questions her ability to do so, and both move about freely in their respective cities. Paulina leaves her husband at the beginning of *La mujer nueva*, never to return she thinks, and her husband, the so-called "carcelero de la muchacha soñadora" (Martín Gaité 116),

---

<sup>17</sup> Carmen Martín Gaité discusses the idea of radical antifeminism in a chapter entitled "La chica rara" in *Desde la ventana: Enfoque femenino de la literatura española* (102-03, 115-17).

actually sees her off at the station. Rather than keep her contained, Eulogio once thought of cutting Paulina loose. The prison metaphor for a woman's role in society that one finds in Mercè Rodoreda's *La plaça del Diamant*, for instance, along with the concomitant attitude of resignation, fails to resonate in the works of Laforet and Salisachs. Paulina and Ida remain hopeful that their renunciation of romantic love will free them from the false bonds of illusion and bring them peace in their pursuit of truth.

As Paulina contemplates her life with Eulogio immediately before his arrival, her soul sinks into a state of "sereno dolor" from which she emerges feeling "el corazón como liberado" (290). After reuniting with Eulogio the following day, "Paulina tuvo la seguridad de que su vida al lado de aquel hombre podía ser profundamente buena" (290), and the novel ends with her feelings "una gran paz. La paz de haber empezado, al fin, su camino y de andar 'en espíritu y en verdad'" (291). The use of "al fin" can only really be appreciated by those who have seen this character develop from Marta into Andrea and from Andrea into Paulina. At each stage of development, at the conclusion of each novel and the beginning of the following, Laforet's protagonist feels as though she will now begin to live the path she was meant to live only to be disillusioned until the conclusion of *La mujer nueva* when she seems to have found her place in society—ironically, the place that the Falange wanted for women, in the domestic sphere. Yet, Paulina assumes her role not by virtue of indoctrination or male persuasion, but rather through individual revelation and spiritual development.

The circular structure of *Nada*, *El volumen de la ausencia*, and *La mujer nueva* might imply that no development transpires in the novels, that Andrea, Ida, and Paulina cannot create essences in Spanish society (not even forty years after the war and the transition to democracy), and yet the external returns to spouses and domestic duties in Ida's and Paulina's cases conceal a spiritual transformation that turns resignation into joyful renunciation and existence into essence. Ida and Paulina awaken to many of the same social limitations that bound their nineteenth-century counterparts, though they certainly have greater access to education, work, and the public sphere without male supervision. Unlike these counterparts, however, who cannot adapt to their respective societies and often commit suicide or die of a wasting illness, Salisachs's and Laforet's protagonists willingly accept their limitations (the ties that bind them to their husbands, children, and even mothers-in-law) and renounce the *feeling* of love for the *practice* thereof. Such metaphysical value might resonate with certain readers, but it certainly detracted from the critical acclaim that celebrated neorealism and technical innovation in the 1950s and 1960s, the "new novel" of the 1970s, and a return to realism in the 1980s. Metaphysical values, especially those that were espoused by Catholic Spain, were out of step with anti- and post-Franco Spain, leading critics to find fault with the construction of *La mujer nueva* and to omit Salisachs and her work from critical anthologies.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> M. García Viñó coined the phrase "el grupo metafísico" for writers he believes are every bit as "sociales y realistas" as the ones named in critical studies, but whose "realismo social y testimonial" is "*trascendente, católico, poético o siquiera personal*" (52; emphasis in original). Pierre Ullman alludes to "[m]any unfavorable judgments on *La mujer nueva*," which he thinks should be refuted. He argues that the plot of *La mujer nueva* "is as subtly woven as *Nada's*," and defends the structure of *La mujer nueva* from the seeming digression of the melodramatic episode with Julián by asserting that, as in *Nada*, Laforet is demonstrating that her

Like nineteenth-century heroines, Ida and Paulina “seek value in a world that expects a woman to define herself by love, marriage, and motherhood” (Rosowski 68). For those who failed to find fulfillment in such a role, adulterous relationships tantalized the noble and insipid alike with a second chance at love, happiness, and self-fulfillment. In stepping outside their domestic spheres and eschewing adulterous relationships, Ida and Paulina re-define themselves. Though they resume roles that their societies have prepared for them, their outward submission conceals their inner transformation. No longer do these characters labor under the illusion of romantic love—whether through marriage or adultery. Rather, they choose to create more authentic selves through the pursuit of truth and transcendental love.

Martín Gaité points to Laforet’s Andrea as the first of many *chicas raras* in twentieth-century Spanish literature. While they continue to populate fiction and film from the mid-1940s to the present day, the mutation in the twenty-first century is that even the *chicas raras* find love, not that romantic love is a myth, as the prototype concludes. Though the *chicas raras*, by virtue of their reproduction, are not so rare anymore, the romantic love that they questioned remains a monolithic myth despite its rejection by the protagonists discussed here in favor of a transcendental and, ironically perhaps, more realistic one. Critics have long dismissed Catholic and transcendental works as antifeminist, and therefore, inimical to the development of the female identity. The works discussed here challenge the accepted wisdom that the state of “submissive womanhood” into which women were born until late in the twentieth century in Spain permitted no development.<sup>19</sup> Though Paulina and Ida choose this role in the end after having sampled the public spaces of Madrid and Barcelona, they do so only after their (delayed) education via epiphanic moments and despite viable options of romantic love, which they eschew. Thus, they demonstrate their development *into* submissive womanhood: a vocation they experience as both liberating and peaceful since they are freed from the illusions of romantic love and receptive to a vocation of charity that begins with their husbands. Their “voyage in” encompasses their inner transformation, their gradual self-awareness, as well as their calculated return to domesticity, which was a traditional destination sociologically since the Enlightenment but a unique development in the history of the female *Bildung* where death usually truncates the recently awakened souls or *failure* seems to haunt those who do not develop as their male counterparts do.

---

protagonists’ attempts to keep the inside and outer worlds apart, to compartmentalize their lives, is to no effect (219).

Two disparaging critics of Salisachs, as Castillo notes, are Juan Luis Alborg and Aparicio López. Ironically, Salisachs, who is often accused of writing *novelas rosas* and low-brow novels, employs more Realist than Romantic discourse in *El volumen de la ausencia* with her metonymic descriptions of places in the city, authoritarian rather than unreliable narrators, and a rejection of romantic love and the exaltation of the “yo.” As Espadas points out, there are important differences between Salisachs’s novels and *novelas rosas* such as the disillusionment with *true love* and the absence of a marriage to a rich man to neatly resolve the novels.

<sup>19</sup> Olga Bezhanova speaks of the “traditional image of submissive womanhood” in her discussion of Rosa Chacel’s *Memorias de Leticia Valle* (1945) (6).

### Works Cited

- Abel, Elizabeth, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland, eds. *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Hanover: UP of New England, 1983. Print.
- Anderson, Andrew A. "Andrea's Baggage: Reading (in) Laforet's *Nada*." *Romance Quarterly* 57.1 (2010): 16-27. Print.
- Andreu, Alicia G. "Huellas textuales en el *Bildungsroman* de Andrea." *Revista de literatura* 59.118 (1997): 595-605. Print.
- Bakhtin, M. M. "The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism." *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Trans. Vern W. McGee. Austin: U of Texas P, 1986. 10-59. Print.
- Barroso, Fernando. "La mujer nueva en Carmen Laforet." *Revista monográfica* 13 (1997). 252-60. Print.
- Bezhanova, Olga. "Female *Bildungsromane* by Rosa Chacel and Ana María Moix: An Intergenerational Dialogue." *LEF-E* 1 (2012): 3-18. Print.
- Boes, Tobias. Introduction. "On the Nature of the *Bildungsroman*." By Karl Morgenstern. Trans. Tobias Boes. *PMLA* 124.2 (2009): 647-49. Print.
- Cabodevilla, José María. *Consolación de la brevedad de la vida*. Madrid: Editorial Católica. 1982. Print.
- Castillo, Debra A. "Mercedes Salisachs, Ideal Womanhood, and the Middlebrow Novel." *Intertextual Pursuits: Literary Mediations in Modern Spanish Narrative*. Ed. Jeanne P. Brownlow and John W. Kronik. Lewisburgh: Bucknell UP, 1998. 97-125. Print.
- Cerezales, Agustín. *Carmen Laforet*. Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1982. Print.
- Collins, Marsha S. "Carmen Laforet's *Nada*: Fictional Form and the Search for Identity." *Symposium* 38.4 (1984): 298-310. Print.
- De la Fuente, Inmaculada. *Mujeres de la posguerra: De Carmen Laforet a Rosa Chacel*. Barcelona: Planeta, 2002. Print.
- Del Mastro, Mark P. "Deception through Narrative Structure and Female Adolescent Development in Laforet's *Nada* and *La isla y los demonios*." *Confluencia* 20.1 (2004): 45-53. Print.
- . "Psychosocial Development and Female Identity in Laforet's *La mujer nueva*." *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 83.6 (2006): 509-21. Print.
- El Saffar, Ruth. "Structural and Thematic Tactics of Suppression in Carmen Laforet's *Nada*." *Symposium* 28 (1974): 119-29. Print.
- Entrambasaguas, Joaquín de. "La segunda novela de Carmen Laforet." *Revista de literatura* 1 (1952): 236-40. Print.
- Espadas, Elizabeth. "El amor en los tiempos de la transición española: Dos miradas." *Homenaje a Mercedes Salisachs: Más de cincuenta años en la literatura*. Ed. Antonio Ayuso Pérez. Spec. issue of *Espéculo* (2008): n. pag. Web. 11 May 2013.
- García Viñó, M. "La nueva novela española." *La nueva novela europea*. Paul Conrad Kurz et al. Madrid: Guadarrama, 1968. 47-80. Print.
- Goya, Francisco. *Los caprichos*. 1797-98. Aquatint. Museo del Prado, Madrid.
- Hart, Stephen M. *White Ink: Essays on Twentieth-Century Feminine Fiction in Spain and Latin America*. London: Tamesis, 1993. Print.

- Hirsch, Marianne. "Spiritual *Bildung*: The Beautiful Soul as Paradigm." *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Ed. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland. Hanover: UP of New England, 1983. 23-48. Print.
- Hirsch Gottfried, Marianne, and David H. Miles. "Defining *Bildungsroman* as a Genre." *PMLA* 91.1 (1976): 122-23. Print.
- Johnson, Roberta. *Carmen Laforet*. Boston: Twayne, 1981. Print.
- Jordan, Barry. "Laforet's *Nada* as Female *Bildung*?" *Symposium* 46. 2 (1992): 105-18. Print.
- Laforet, Carmen. *La mujer nueva*. 1955. Barcelona: Destino, 1970. Print.
- . *Nada*. 1945. Barcelona: Destino, 2007. Print.
- Marrone, Claire. "Male and Female *Bildung*: The *Mémoires de Céleste Mogador*." *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 25.3-4 (1997): 335-47. Print.
- Martín Gaité, Carmen. "La chica rara." *Desde la ventana: Enfoque femenino de la literatura española*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1992. 101-22. Print.
- Miles, David H. "The Pícaro's Journey to the Confessional: The Changing Image of the Hero in the German *Bildungsroman*." *PMLA* 89.5 (1974): 980-92. Print.
- Ortega y Gasset, José. *El espectador: Sobre el fascismo. Democracia morbosa. Hegel y América. La interpretación bélica de la historia. Socialización del hombre, etc.* Madrid: EDAF, 1998. Print.
- Pérez Firmat, Gustavo. "Carmen Laforet: The Dilemma of Artistic Vocation." *Women Writers of Contemporary Spain*. Ed. Joan L. Brown. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1991. 26-41. Print.
- Rogers, B. G. *Proust's Narrative Techniques*. Geneva: Droz, 1965. Print.
- Rosowski, Susan J. "The Novel of Awakening." *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Ed. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland. Hanover: UP of New England, 1983. 49-68. Print.
- Sáinz, José Ángel. "*Nada* o el fracaso de una iniciación." *La torre* 4.14 (1999): 719-33. Print.
- Salisachs, Mercedes. *El volumen de la ausencia*. Barcelona: Planeta, 1983. Print.
- . *Goodbye, España*. Madrid: Martínez Roca. 2009. Print.
- . *La gangrena*. Barcelona: Planeta, 1975. Print.
- Schyfter, Sara. "The Male Mystique in Carmen Laforet's *Nada*." *Novelistas femeninas de la postguerra española*. Ed. Janet W. Pérez. Madrid: Porrúa Turanzas, 1983. 85-93. Print.
- Silbert [Cather, Willa]. Rev. of *The Awakening*, by Kate Chopin. *Pittsburgh Leader* 8 July 1899: 6. Print.
- Spires, Robert C. "*Nada* y la paradoja de los signos negativos." *Siglo XX/20th Century* 3.1-2 (1985-86): 31-33. Print.
- Tatum-Davis, Alison N. "Carmen Laforet's *Nada*: Upward and Outward Bound in Barcelona." *Leading Ladies: Mujeres en la literatura hispana y en las artes*. Ed. Yvonne Fuentes and Margaret R. Parker. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2006. 119-34. Print.
- Thomas, Michael D. "Symbolic Portals in Laforet's *Nada*." *Anales de la novela de posguerra* 3 (1978): 57-74. Print.
- Ullman, Pierre. "The Moral Structure of Carmen Laforet's Novels." *The Vision Obscured: Perceptions of Some Twentieth-Century Catholic Novelists*. Ed. Melvin J. Friedman. NY: Fordham UP, 1970. 201-19. Print.
- Villegas Morales, Juan. "*Nada* de Carmen Laforet o la infantilización de la aventura legendaria." *La estructura mítica del héroe en la novela del siglo XX*. Barcelona: Planeta, 1973. 177-201. Print.