The Female Struggle for Identity and Autonomy

in Carmen Laforet's *La llamada*

*By Mark P. Del Mastro*

*College of Charleston*

While fixating on Carmen Laforet's most acclaimed work, *Nada* (1945), scholars have largely overlooked the author's seven short novels (1952-55). Roberta Johnson's 1981 book *Carmen Laforet* is to date the most complete study of these novelettes, but still missing is a broader examination of the female search for an independent identity—one not defined by or relying upon men, the period's privileged sex in Franco's Spain—that several of Laforet's characters portray.¹ Such an approach is necessary given the pervasive theme of identity exploration throughout the author's works and her attempt in life to determine her own role and personal philosophy in an ideologically-oppressive dictatorship.² Mirroring Laforet's own struggles, the women in her short novels are not always overtly successful in their quests. The exemplary representation of these toils is the middle-aged protagonist Mercedes in *La llamada* (1954), a novelette that especially for readers of 1950s Spain is an obvious endorsement of the values of charity and marital responsibility that both Francisco Franco's regime and the Catholic Church espoused. Although the following study does not dispute this representation, particularly since Laforet wrote *La llamada* during her Catholic rebirth, it will attempt to demonstrate that concurrent with her pro-Catholic message is one of feminist protest that complements the author's search for an independent identity prevalent throughout much of her work.
"Feminist," however, has a unique meaning in the context of 1950s Spain and Laforet's relationships during this time. As previously mentioned, Laforet penned *La llamada* during a seven-year period of her life when she passionately embraced Catholicism. Specifically, and as Laforet herself recounts in a 1989 interview with Marie-Lise Gazarian, this stage began after a somewhat mystical experience in Madrid in 1951, and it coincided with important friendships, such as that with María Campo-Alange, defender of women's rights and author of *La secreta guerra de los sexos* (1948), that not only complemented the author's religious convictions but also exposed Laforet to a "feminismo elegante" that did not threaten the Catholic values of Franco's regime but served as a seed for future feminist movements in Spain (de la Fuente 99). It is this "inoffensive" and relatively subtle feminism of Campo-Alange that Laforet displays in *La llamada* and other works from this period such as *La isla y los demonios* (1952) and *La mujer nueva* (1955).

Conveying Laforet's feminist message is the portrayal of the female protagonist's identity quest. In recent years and using Erik Erikson's psychoanalytic theories of identity as a basis of examination, I have repeatedly examined identity development in Laforet's work. Of particular relevance to this study is my 2006 article where I apply Erikson's theories to the identity quest of Paulina, the 33-year-old protagonist of *La mujer nueva* (1955). Where in my other articles I focus primarily on adolescent protagonists, in my study of Paulina I explore an adult's search for self, one that mirrors many of the identity issues Laforet herself confronted during much of her life, and one that is also central to *La llamada*. Of course, with the suggestion that Erikson's theories will serve as a partial basis for yet another study on Laforet's work, one logically questions the need to repeat an already implemented approach. The answer is two-fold: 1) an examination of Laforet's portrayal of an adult's search-for-self—in contrast to the adolescent's—
not only reinforces the ongoing argument that many of the author's works are autobiographical, but it also demonstrates that the identity quests of these works reflect the author's life-long struggles to reconcile her own roles as mother, spouse, writer and Catholic; 2) Erik Erikson's pioneering work on identity development is not just another passé theoretical approach whose application to literary studies represents one more clever exercise in the spirit of many other published psychoanalytic interpretations. Because social scientists throughout the Western world today still widely accept Erikson's pioneering, theoretical framework as the basis for their assessment of human psychosocial development, and because Laforet's protagonist in *La llamada* exposes aspects of the author's own struggle for identity, an accurate interpretation of this novelette as a work addressing questions of female identity in post-war Spain must therefore be undertaken with some careful consideration of Erikson's ideas.

Perhaps the most well-known yet cliché of Erikson's ideas is the "identity crisis," which is original and central to his identity theory and most commonly refers to a youth's process of establishing an identity. Although identity issues are indeed more prevalent during adolescence, Erikson recognizes that adults frequently undergo many aspects of the adolescent crisis. During this crisis period, which Erikson calls a "psychosocial moratorium" (*Identity: Youth and Crisis* 156), one explores different life options, experimenting with different selves through others and sampling diverse beliefs to create trust and faith in others. With "identity confusion," one fails either to identify with a group or to assume a specific social role, and they therefore tend to over-identify with unsuitable "heroes" (131-32). Hence the success of identity formation depends on an individual's choices of identification, their adoption of ideas, and society's reaction to these selections. The most severe outcome would be what Erikson names a “negative identity” where one's choices do not complement what society deems appropriate (174).
Erikson also states that the complete life span can be divided into eight stages: infancy (stage I), early childhood (II), play age (III), school age (IV), adolescence (V), young adulthood (VI), adulthood (VII), and old age (VIII). The respective psychosocial crises for these stages are basic trust vs. basic mistrust (stage I), autonomy vs. shame and doubt (II), initiative vs. guilt (III), industry vs. inferiority (IV), identity vs. identity confusion (V), intimacy vs. isolation (VI), generativity vs. stagnation (VII), and integrity vs. despair (VIII) (The Life Cycle Completed). Generativity in stage VII, adulthood, includes "procreativity, productivity, and creativity" (67). With the failure of generative fulfillment, the adult becomes self-centered and idle while likely returning to prior periods of Eriksonian development such as stage VI, young adulthood, and/or stage V, adolescence, which are characterized by the aforementioned crises of "intimacy vs. isolation" and "identity vs. identity confusion," respectively (56-57).

In La llamada, the protagonist Mercedes Martí, like Laforet herself, grapples with integrating her artistic ambitions and the social obligations that motherhood and marriage represent. Failing to experience fulfillment of productive love and work, or the "generativity" of Erikson's stage VII, the 50-year-old Mercedes succumbs to the aforementioned "stagnation" and she consequently regresses to an adolescent identity-search shown in her abandoning family to become an actress in the city. While Spanish society of the 1950s greatly frowns upon such "inappropriate" actions and aspirations of a woman—whose only ambitions should be devoted wife and mother—Mercedes has retained her artistic dreams despite not physically pursuing them since her youth. As an adolescent, she actually exemplified the independent female character that contradicted the regime's prescribed role. Mercedes was "muy fogosa," which complicated efforts by her aunt and uncle, her guardians, to find her a "good" husband capable of reforming or at least controlling her undesirable behavior (La llamada 16). At 18, the
protagonist escaped the house to join "un tipo poco escrupuloso" who promised her opportunity on the acting stage, but she was retrieved before leaving the country. The result was a "verdadero escándalo" that contributed to her aunt's death and signaled society's rejection of her dream to become an actress.  

Following Mercedes' return home, her aunt and uncle—agents of Franco's conservative ideology—attempted to subdue the protagonist's "scandalous" spirit and forcefully define her identity by marrying her to José López, known as the "Sargento." It was no coincidence that a soldier, a quintessential symbol of the regime's values, was the man whom Mercedes was pressured to marry. Since their nuptials, the "Sargento" has somewhat succeeded in physically restraining his wife with the burden of seven children and regular beatings that reflect a relationship devoid of productive and beneficial love as also visible in the protagonist's current appearance: "... frondona, descuidada, sin peinar un cabello que ya no era rubio" (20). Her facade is one of the few things she can control to combat the era's conservative ideal of the woman as "ama de casa y bonita esposa" (Martín Gaite 119). In other words, despite behavior restrictions, Mercedes has still maintained an independent spirit through her ongoing dream to escape to the acting stage. Nevertheless, these hopes are hindered by her lack of money, another material instrument controlling her autonomy.  

Yet physical restrictions are partially lifted when the 77-year-old don Juan Roses, an old friend of Carlos Martí, the protagonist's late uncle and guardian, visits Mercedes unexpectedly. After hearing her heart-wrenching life-story, don Juan Roses gives her money that she sees as a means to leave her miserable home life behind and live in Barcelona with doña Eloisa, the mother-in-law of her niece Lolita. However, and despite Mercedes' own decision to leave her home, it is a man who affords her the means to take this initiative.  

The protagonist's freedom,
therefore, is compromised from the very beginning by the control and influence that others—in
this case don Juan Roses—have in her quest for a satisfying job and identity. This
social/monetary control is pervasive throughout the story, as the reader will see ahead, thereby
giving Mercedes a false sense of independence, personal growth and progress with the inevitable
and ultimate failure of her search.

Aside from don Juan Roses' indispensable financial assistance, partially motivating the
protagonist's departure from home is her life-long dream of freedom and success on the stage,
and she is specifically drawn to doña Eloísa who showed genuine concern for Mercedes by
opposing marriage to the "Sargento." The irony in partly relying on the elderly doña Eloísa is
that she is the absolute antithesis of the independent ideal for she "siempre había sido mantenida,
vestida, cuidada por alguien. Primero los padres. Desde los dieciete años, su marido" (La
llamada 33). Doña Eloísa lives as a dependent in the home of her son Luis and his wife Lolita,
the daughter of Mercedes' late sister María Rosa. Therefore, the protagonist's arrival to the home
of her niece's family in Barcelona with the expectation of material support from an unemployed
and virtually penniless elderly woman only reinforces the hopeless tone of Mercedes' autonomy-
quest as enabled by don Juan Roses' donation. Even doña Eloísa confirms her own dependence
by confessing to Mercedes that because her son Luis owns the home, only he can grant the
protagonist permission to stay with the family. Once again, the authority of another patriarch
controls Mercedes' freedom, yet because she has no other alternatives to attempt her search, she
must subject herself to these undesirable circumstances. If she rejects Roses' support, she is still
trapped in her stagnant and abusive household; but by accepting his aid, she can choose how to
use the funds to pursue her objectives. Nevertheless, her choices are greatly limited due to
inadequate monies, lack of employment and the people she relies upon for help. In the case of doña Eloísa, the only unlimited support she can afford Mercedes is emotional.

After arriving to Barcelona, however, the protagonist manages to sustain herself independently for about one week until don Juan Roses' money disappears. Still jobless, although she remains optimistic about employment in the theater, Mercedes ironically asks doña Eloísa for money: 10 pesetas for lodging. As previously noted, the elderly woman relies on her son for financial support, but her response mirrors the actions of other Laforetian female characters such as Andrea in Nada and Marta in La isla y los demonios. In these works the young protagonists, like doña Eloísa in her predicament of perpetual reliance, use the limited material possessions at their disposal in attempts to exercise autonomy. In Nada, Andrea lacks funds to buy her friend Ena a gift, so she decides to give Ena the handkerchief she received from her grandmother as a first communion present; in La isla y los demonios, Marta sells her jewelry to buy a boat ticket to travel to Cádiz from her home in the Canary Islands; and in La llamada, doña Eloísa shares her lunch—a cup of warm, sour milk and a piece of bread—with Mercedes, then she gives the protagonist her only possession of value—a gem-encrusted, gold pocket watch—so Mercedes can pawn it for additional funds. In each of these cases, Andrea, Marta, doña Eloísa and Mercedes all act surreptitiously since their only way to behave freely is through violating the oppressive social mores, but the impact of doña Eloísa's actions are substantially less productive than those of Andrea and Marta who actually enjoy success in their respective identity searches. This contrast of success underlines the relatively powerless situation of the women in La llamada and the novella's disappointing conclusion.

Nevertheless, Mercedes still tries to exercise some independence—financial and social—to remain in Erikson's adolescent "psychosocial moratorium" and continue her pursuit of a self-
satisfying identity: with the money she receives for doña Eloísa's watch, she purchases an evening gown "de quinta mano" (40) for her public debut at a place where aspiring artists test their skills on stage. The overly-worn dress not only signals the economic conditions of post-civil-war Spain, but it also contrasts with the protagonist's more idealized ambitions. As is the case with many other female characters from Laforet's novels and short stories, what motivates Mercedes in spite of social hurdles is her fantasy, an outlet for mental freedom when external conditions—gender and age discrimination, financial dependence, etc.—are too overwhelming to conquer. Barbara Baker Sommer observes that during the adolescent identity search—a process re-visited by Laforet's oppressed, adult women characters such as Mercedes—fantasizing/dreaming is a critical mechanism for individuals to gain some control over their lives in an otherwise restrictive environment (117). Though the reader sees Mercedes' purchase as an unproductive step toward her ultimate goal, this exercise complements her mental outlet and thereby provides some satisfaction and hope, albeit temporary.

To further sustain her dream, the protagonist convinces doña Eloísa to attend her performance only after the elderly woman first successfully negotiates from Mercedes her husband's address, the significance of which becomes evident later. Because leaving her son's home in the evening is impossible given period customs, doña Eloísa must lie to her family to avoid scandalizing them with her true motive. Again, a female character—despite good intentions that in doña Eloísa's case are purely charitable—must deceive social norms to act independently. As a result, doña Eloísa feels tremendous guilt for her dishonest act, particularly given her devout Catholic faith and that she initially told her family she was leaving to attend church (afterward she has Mercedes call Luis and Lolita on her behalf to explain that she would return home late because of a dinner invitation). Despite her attempts to avoid consequences
from her evening jaunt, her family is still appalled by her 2AM return. In fact, society interprets such behavior as the result of a mental or spiritual illness, so Lolita and Luis first call in a doctor later that morning to confirm that doña Eloísa is psychologically sound; they then enlist Father Jiménez, her confidant, to verify her spiritual well-being. What eventually excuses the woman is the priest's explanation that charity drove doña Eloísa's actions, which are therefore no cause for alarm. As a powerful component of Spain's oppressive norms, the Catholic motive absolves the woman, and her family has no other option but to accept the clergyman's defense, especially since Father Jiménez ensures them that doña Eloísa would not repeat the episode. Lolita and Luis then conclude that the elderly woman simply spent the night keeping vigil over a deceased neighbor. Period restrictions on female movement between physical spaces is as overbearing as the financial limitations women endure, and in the case of a senior such as Eloísa, activity that defies conservative social customs must be explained as either lunacy or an aberrant act rationalized within the dictatorship's sanctioned Catholic philosophy; the understanding, of course and as reassured by Father Jiménez, an authorized agent of the regime's philosophy, is that the elderly woman will never do it again.

Society is less forgiving of Mercedes as the audience jeers her debut, a performance that the protagonist's physical appearance exacerbates: "Estaba horrible. Era horrible su traje. Horrible su cabello quemado a trozos, con las raíces oscuras. Horribles aquellos abalorios que se había puesto..." (54). Immediately after this humiliating experience, Mercedes implores doña Eloísa to write her husband that she is returning home. With the same generosity that her attendance at the debut represents, doña Eloísa reacts sincerely: "—Hija... Eso es una tontería... No tienes ahora más motivos para volverte a tu casa que hace un rato... Esta gente grosera no entiende tu arte, eso es lo que pasa, y nada más... No debes desesperarte" (55). When the
protagonist then asks if she enjoyed her performance, doña Eloísa replies: "—Mucho, hija mía… Tienes mucho talento" (55). Mercedes has definitively become disillusioned by the reality facing ambitious women and their dreams: their identity/vocation or "la llamada" in Spanish society of the period can not be self-serving, despite their years of unselfish sacrifice for their family and others in part to conform to conservative customs. The protagonist's plea that doña Eloísa contact the "Sargento" is an acknowledgment that her life-long dream is now impossible, and the elderly woman's urging that Mercedes return to her family reinforces society's expectations, which doña Eloísa has always followed well with the known exception of her late-night attendance at Mercedes' debut. Also, doña Eloísa's praise for the protagonist's talents and her recognition of the public's under-appreciation of Mercedes' abilities suggest an understanding that female aspirations, despite how noble, are only possible when complying with social norms. For doña Eloísa, the failed debut will allow the disillusioned artist to see her true "llamada" or vocation and return to her family to assume a more "acceptable" role as wife and mother. This does not mean that doña Eloísa is simply enforcing society's conservative expectations, but shackled herself by period customs, she realizes that a woman's relatively comfortable existence is only possible through conformity. Fulfilling Erikson's notion of "generativity," therefore, becomes a restricted, unfulfilling and close-ended process for Mercedes where she is forced to assume a socially-sanctioned role—that of housewife and mother—instead of the more rewarding course of defining her own identity freely. In addition, and as Erikson observes, in a case such as Mercedes where an identity choice is not socially acceptable—despite personal gratification for the seeker—the end result is unavoidably negative.

The events that follow the debut show the protagonist's absolute social compliance in response to her Eriksonian negative identity, the failure to achieve a socially-approved and self-
gratifying identity. First, Mercedes finds a job as a house servant for a modest family, a chore that ironically mirrors the many duties she saw as restrictive when she first decided to abandon her family, but she accepts this employment to repay doña Eloísa for the pocket watch. Although this post seems to reflect some financial autonomy, it is both contrary to the artistic role Mercedes desired and a financial obligation that she feels compelled to fulfill. True autonomy, therefore, is still elusive, but the novelette also seems to emphasize the importance of the protagonist's new-found sense of responsibility toward others, in keeping with Laforet's own Catholic re-birth. When doña Eloísa receives an encouraging reply from Mercedes' oldest son that the family misses their mother and wife, the elderly woman urges the protagonist to forget repayment for the gold timepiece and return home. With her transformed sense of obligation, Mercedes heeds this advice and experiences a quasi-mystical epiphany, similar to that of the 33-year-old Paulina in Laforet's 1955 novel La mujer nueva. "Mercedes sentía una gran paz y, sí, alegría… Era como si hubiera estado muy enferma y un medicamento fuerte la hubiera curado. Todo se le volvía de pronto tan natural, tan sencillo, tan limpio…" (La llamada 62).11 Mercedes' illness was her "misguided" ambition to become an actress, and the "cure" was her recognition of the importance of abandoning such aspirations and assuming her social duty as a responsible wife and mother, regardless of the miserable circumstances of her marriage.

The ultra-conservative Catholic and socio-political ideologies of the period facilitate Mercedes' epiphany, one that despite the obvious emphasis on religious values, still leads the reader to consider the co-existing and seemingly opposing theme of female independence. The protagonist's subsequent decision to return to her family indeed reinforces the pro-Catholic stances of charity and persevering marital responsibility that Mercedes herself supports when she confesses that her self-centeredness has changed to a concern for others' suffering: "De que no
sólo sufro yo, sino también otros . . . " (61). Although previously noted that La llamada and other works by Laforet in the 1950s reflect a "feminismo elegante" that did not threaten the dictatorship's views, questions still emerge about how the novelette's conclusion might complement this feminist position, if at all. For example, is Mercedes' "conversion" simply one of convenience? Since society thwarts her quest for a liberated identity, does her change of heart actually represent a surrendering to social pressures? Also, does Mercedes' post-conversion philosophy reflect a true commitment to the same values she despised her entire life, and does she now accept social conformity as her fate? Laforet uses the term "locura" to describe the protagonist's past mind-set while also declaring that Mercedes is now "cured." Society deems Mercedes' pursuits as crazy because she ignored social norms, but she is "cured" once she abandons her identity quest. At the story's end, Mercedes returns to a home governed by the "Sargento," the abusive, model agent of the regime and its principles. Does Laforet truly believe that for the sake of Christianity a woman should sacrifice herself by yielding to an unrewarding marriage? A partial answer is that the author herself struggled to resolve similar issues, evinced in part by the later discontinuation of her own dogmatic practice of Catholicism, and more significantly by her definitive separation—although never legally divorced—from her husband, Manuel Cerezales, in 1970. The definition of "mad" or unacceptable behavior is muddled by the complex circumstances that Spanish women of the period faced. Mercedes' return home, although addressing a spousal/maternal obligation, does not remedy her husband's cruel treatment. However, shirking her parental duties for any reason is not an acceptable option in her society, and although the story's conclusion sheds a positive Christian light on the "milagro" (63) that is her "conversion," Mercedes still faces the dilemma of all unfulfilled, married Spanish women of the period: reconciling the psychological need to achieve a gratifying identity with the
inflexible responsibility of matrimony. Although Laforet certainly does not advocate upholding marital responsibilities at all costs, she seems to recognize that successfully reconciling this dilemma is elusive.

Reinforcing this quandary is the ever-changing significance of the novelette's title, La llamada. The initial reference is don Juan Roses' visit and gift of money that "calls" Mercedes to pursue the "vocation" of actress. Upon arriving to Barcelona, Mercedes in turn "calls" upon doña Eloísa for moral and financial support in pursuing her "vocation," while the narrative also reveals doña Eloísa's belief that her daily prayers for Mercedes since the protagonist's marriage have resulted in God's calling Mercedes to Barcelona. With the protagonist's arrival, however, doña Eloísa prays again—or calls God—to clarify her own role in Mercedes' life. Giving Mercedes the gold pocket watch is doña Eloísa's answer: exercise charity by assisting the protagonist. The calling continues to evolve following Mercedes' awful debut and with doña Eloísa's letter to the protagonist's family, to which Mercedes' oldest child responds by calling for his mother to return home. When Mercedes confesses to the old woman that her vocation or "calling" has changed with this experience, doña Eloísa responds that her conversion was the result of "una llamada de Dios al corazón de Mercedes" (61). The conclusion leaves the two main characters with quite different interpretations of the definitive "llamada" that leads the protagonist back home. For doña Eloísa "la llamada" was divine intervention, while for Mercedes it was a remedy that experience administered. The ambiguity of the term "llamada" strengthens and complicates the novelette's central theme: the challenge of integrating female ambitions and society's expectations in 1950s Spain.

The dubious happy ending and its accompanying lack of female independence reflect Laforet's own lifetime struggles with balancing her obligations of motherhood and matrimony
with her ambitions as an author. As found in works by other postwar women writers such as Ana María Matute, Carmen Martín Gaite, Dolores Medio, Elena Quiroga and Mercè Rodoreda, among others, La llamada displays the same preoccupation for what Galdona Pérez calls "…una falta de libertad que anula aspectos fundamentales de la personalidad femenina; esa (des)figurada (persona)lidad de la mujer…” (110). Far from endorsing Franco's prescribed role of the compliant wife, and despite the apparent resolution of Mercedes' quest and the related attainment of Erikson's generative fulfillment, the protagonist's return home in La llamada is a glaring reminder of the limited opportunities for Spanish women of the period and that female resignation to social pressures does not necessarily afford identity achievement.
Notes

1 Graciela Illanes Adaro's book *La novelística de Carmen Laforet* (1971) is another study that Laforetian scholarship has frequently cited. However, Illanes Adaro's lean discussion of *La llamada* is essentially a superficial plot summary with the brief mention of the story's narrative style, Azorín-like descriptions, humor and the post-civil war setting. The 1997 study by Luis María Quintana Tejera also lacks an in-depth examination of the female quest for identity and autonomy in *La llamada*.


3 Relaying the inspiration for her novel *La mujer nueva* (1955) in her 1989 interview with Marie-Lise Gazarian, Laforet describes the experience in 1951 that initiated her Catholic revival:

   It (*La mujer nueva*) grew out of something that happened to me while I was passing by a fountain at El Retiro Park in Madrid. All of a sudden, I felt a tremendous surge of happiness and a certainty that humanity was moving toward something wonderful, namely God. I spent three days saying I discovered the world, I discovered life, I discovered religion. I was so happy when I woke up each morning that I would wander in awe in the streets and think that all the horrible, ugly people I saw were actually wonderful because we were all moving toward God. The third day I woke up as I was before, without understanding anything, but knowing that this had happened to me. (Gazarian 1991: 157)

   After this “quasi-mystical experience” (Johnson 1981: 28), Laforet tried to be “dogmatically religious” for about two years (Gazarian 1991: 157); she then spent nearly seven years attempting to settle her doubts about Catholicism.
To date, my published studies address questions of identity in Laforet's first four novels and selected short stories.

One immediately thinks of the numerous literary studies that apply the renowned theories of Freud (ideological mentor of Erikson, though Erikson rejected the significant Freudian concepts of instinct and the unconscious) and Jung, but in assessing real-life psychosocial development as portrayed in literature, there are clear problems with such an approach: 1) the difficulty for social scientists to generate empirical data to support Freud and Jung's ideas about the unconscious; 2) the consequent waning presence of Freud and Jung's theories in contemporary human-development literature. In their largely Eriksonian-based views of human development, today's social scientists appreciate, but generally shun, Freud's and Jung's ideas.

Arnett, Lerner, Moshman and Shaffer, among many others, acknowledge Erikson's pioneering work on identity in the 1950s and 60s and its influence on contemporary research and current identity development theory. Through 40 years of his own studies (1966-present), James E. Marcia, Erikson's most renowned interpreter today, has refined, operationalized and authenticated Erikson's theory with the 'Identity Status Interview,' an instrument that categorizes adolescents—although also applicable to adults—into one of four identity stages: diffusion, moratorium, foreclosure or achievement. Josselson's 1991 book Finding Herself, for example, substantiates Erikson's theory by using Marcia's categorization not only as the basis of examining the development of both sexes, but also as a valid tool for analyzing female identity formation.

Regarding Spanish women's roles during Franco's dictatorship, Rafael Torres remarks: "… la misión que el régimen había endilgado a la mujer era, exclusivamente, la de enamorarse, casarse y tener todos los hijos que mandara Dios" (78). Founded by the right-wing Falange española in 1934, the Sección Femenina complemented this perspective along with that of the
Roman Catholic Church during the following four decades. Specifically regarding careers for women, the Catholic Church and the Sección Femenina viewed female emancipation—economic, social and physiological—as a grave danger for society since a woman's only place was "dentro de los muros del hogar" (Gallego Méndez 141). For more on the Sección Femenina, see studies by Gallego Méndez and Suárez Fernández.

8 In several of Laforet's works, acting along with other creative arts such as drawing, painting and writing also become many characters' preferred psychological and physical means to flee the disagreeable circumstances of their environments. For example, in La isla y los demonios, Marta writes poetry; in La insolación and Al volver la esquina, Martín paints; in the short story "Rosamunda," Felisa writes poetry and acts. The roles of art and artist will be discussed later in this essay.

9 Although they are not always responsible for enabling women's freedom in Laforet's works, men do frequently play decisive roles in allowing the protagonists some level of autonomy as displayed in La isla y los demonios and La insolación.

10 See my articles on female identity and autonomy in Laforet's Nada and La isla y los demonios.

11 In La mujer nueva, Paulina's quasi-mystical experience spurs feelings similar to those of Mercedes: "De repente, sintió como una llamarada de felicidad... Mucho más que eso. Lo que sentía no cabe en la estrecha palabra felicidad: Gozo" (Novelas 1135).

12 Martín Gaite notes that it was a wife's conjugal duty to tolerate marital hardships in postwar Spain (21).

13 See de la Fuente's study on women writers of postwar Spain.
Works Cited


---. "Deception through Narrative Structure and Female Adolescent Development in Laforet's *Nada* and *La isla y los demonios*." *Confluencia* 20.1 (Fall 2004): 45-53.


