FIRST-WAVE SPANISH FEMINISM:
NEGOTIATING THE CHANGING FACES OF MOTHERHOOD AND MATERNITY
THROUGH NARRATIVE

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Spanish
by
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ABSTRACT

The present dissertation will examine the complexities of Spain’s early twentieth-century feminist movement through a precise focus on depictions of the maternal experience in women’s literature. Specifically, this project will investigate representations of maternity and motherhood in both the fictional narratives and non-fiction essays of three Spanish women: Carmen de Burgos (1867-1932), Margarita Nelken (1896-1968), and Federica Montseny (1905-1994). These three individuals were among the increasing number of educated women who began to earn their living by writing about those women’s issues which provoked conversation and debate within the increasingly visible Spanish feminist movement. By transcending genres and publishing their essays, novels, and novels in popular journals, periodicals, and revistas, Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny are emblematic of the way in which Spanish women began to articulate their unique voices within a variety of public literary domains.

Historically, first-wave Spanish feminism has been classified as delayed, too conservative, or even a complete failure by numerous historians and literary scholars. Yet the so-called “traditional” women-centered experiences of maternity and motherhood in fact played crucial transformative roles within the nascent Spanish feminist discourse. In reality, the prevalence of maternal issues within women’s writing at this time – especially in the literary production of women exhibiting liberal, feminist inclinations – necessitates a cautiously critical analysis within the context of a uniquely Spanish cultural milieu. Rather than stifling, or proving detrimental to the women’s movement, I suggest that feminist appropriations of maternal values and motherhood were, on the contrary, the precise points at which we can perceive a radical feminist ideology that threatened the very foundations of
Spain’s patriarchal society. During the years prior to the First World War, for example, the first steps were taken toward redefining motherhood as a voluntary role, rather than as an obligatory, and lifelong, female identity. Far from uniformly rejecting maternity, however, many European feminists sought to appropriate motherhood within new, modern definitions of womanhood. The result was what historian Ann Taylor Allen has termed the “maternal dilemma,” or the conflict over whether it was possible to be both a mother and an autonomous individual. I have found that early twentieth century Spanish women were acutely aware of this new modern “dilemma,” and their literary representations of mothers and motherhood proved to be frequent, and quite different, from those appearing in novels written before the turn of the century.

The novels and essays that Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny published during the 1920s directly challenged the traditional female ideal (the “angel of the home,” or el ángel del hogar) that had prescribed marriage and motherhood as Spanish women’s exclusive social responsibilities since the sixteenth century. As such, these women writers labored to mitigate anti-feminist attempts to unilaterally define an idealized model of female identity based on motherhood. By taking control of the representations and theorizations of the maternal role through literature, Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny challenged, deconstructed, and even expanded upon the homogenous ángel del hogar in order to create exceptional, heterogeneous interpretations of motherhood which could accommodate a variety of roles and identities. In the end, my analyses of the unique maternal experiences depicted in women’s literature will broaden current perspectives concerning the scope of first-wave feminism in the peninsula and bring us a step closer to articulating a distinctly Spanish vision of feminism in the early twentieth century.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ vii

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1

First-Wave Spanish Feminism: Similarities and Differences within Western Europe.......................... 5

The Maternal Dilemma and the Dilemma of Difference.............................................. 11

The Survival and Enduring Influence of La perfecta casada and the Ángel del hogar................................................................. 18

Anti-feminist Appropriations of Feminist “Difference” Discourse.................... 21

Women’s Representation and Participation in Literature: Social Modernism............................ 26

Tres mujeres modernas: Carmen de Burgos (1867-1932), Margarita Nelken (1896-1968), and Federica Montseny (1905-94)..... 31

Summation of Chapters............................................................................................... 40

Chapter 2: URBAN MOTHERHOOD AND INSTITUTIONAL POWER IN THE LITERATURE OF CARMEN DE BURGOS.................. 51

The Feminism of Carmen de Burgos, “Colombine” (1867-1932).................. 52

Maternity Ward Horrors: Urban Motherhood in La rampa (1917)..................... 65

Wife and Mother, or Monster? Exploring Female Subjectivity and the Maternal Dilemma in Quiero vivir mi vida (1931)............... 93

Chapter 3: THE ECONOMICS OF MOTHERHOOD AND THE DEFENSE OF MATERNITY IN THE LITERATURE OF MARGARITA NELKEN.......... 126

The Feminism of Margarita Nelken (1898-1968).................................................. 122

The Economics of Motherhood: (Re)Negotiating Gender in the Public and Private Spheres in La trampa del arenal (1923)......... 140

Dignifying Motherhood as a Feminist Project: En torno a nosotras (1927) 169
Chapter 4: THE ART OF MATERNITY IN THE LITERATURE OF FEDERICA MONTSENY ................................................................. 191

The “Anarcho-Feminism” of Federica Montseny (1905-1994) ............... 193

Incorporating Motherhood within an Individualist Model of Woman: La indomable (1928) ......................................................... 208

Exploring the Paradoxical Politics of Mothering in “Maternidad” (1925) and “El derecho al hijo” (1927) ....................... 229

Chapter 5: CONCLUSION .......................................................... 263

Bibliography ................................................................................... 271
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Despite the central importance of [motherhood] to the history of women and of feminism, it has often been neglected by historians, who are usually most interested in women’s entry into new areas such as politics, the professions, sports, and social life outside the family. Motherhood, many imply, was a “traditional” role, and feminists who emphasized it are often identified as conservatives whose contribution was minor, if not actually harmful.


Suffrage, divorce, education, protective labor laws, and even prostitution – these were among the diverse issues affecting modern, Spanish women during the early decades of the twentieth century. Yet in addition to these varied and immediate concerns, perhaps the most urgent, widespread, and contentious issue surfacing in feminist (and anti-feminist) circles was motherhood. In early twentieth-century Spain, as a matter of fact, motherhood and maternity were so pervasive in the various discourses surrounding women’s rights and social reform that many historians have pointed to these maternal themes as the principal weaknesses of the early Spanish feminist movement. Mary Nash even suggests that “the theoretical glass ceiling of the Spanish women’s movement was the inability to challenge motherhood as the nucleus of female identity” (“Un/Contested Identities” 40). However, the prevalence of maternal issues within women’s writing during this time – especially in the literary production of those women exhibiting liberal, feminist inclinations – necessitates a cautiously critical analysis within the context of a uniquely Spanish cultural milieu. Rather than stifling, or proving detrimental to the women’s movement, I suggest that feminist appropriations of maternal values and motherhood were, on the contrary, the precise points at
which we can perceive a radical feminist ideology that threatened the very foundations of Spain’s patriarchal society.¹

Ann Taylor Allen has pointed out that, despite its central importance, motherhood has often been neglected by historians, and its close connection to tradition causes many who do emphasize its importance to be dismissed as too conservative, or even detrimental to the movement (2). This is particularly relevant to the Spanish context, as both conservative and liberal feminists, as well as anti-feminist institutions, worked to reaffirm, for their own ends, the crucial value of motherhood.² This traditional female role occupied the center of the conservative cultural discourse of woman as the ángel del hogar, which remained popular through the early twentieth century. Even more, though many Spanish women promoted liberal social reform agendas through the formulation of a new, modern woman (mujer moderna) whilst articulating their concerns against the ángel del hogar as a traditional, patriarchal ideology, they did not necessarily reject maternity, one of the key components of this conventional paradigm’s configuration of women’s social role. In this regard, Allen observes, “feminist discourses on motherhood were fixed neither on ‘timeless’ and essentialist stereotypes, nor on ‘separate spheres.’ On the contrary, they contributed to a remarkable process of transformation” (2). By taking into account this transformative process surrounding motherhood within the context of a Spanish women’s movement characterized by delay, difference, and an emphasis on social (rather than political) issues, I believe it is possible to perceive a unique maternal discourse associated with first-wave Spanish

¹ In using the term “patriarchy” and “patriarchal,” I follow LeGates’s definition of Western Patriarchy in which women were taught to be subservient to male authority, and in which the public-private dichotomy relegated women to the private sphere of the home while allowing men sole access to the public sphere (13-17).
² Anja Louis discusses this paradoxical trend in her study of Carmen de Burgos: “Motherhood was the distinguishing factor and this issue was used by everybody: male dominant discourse used it to establish the ángel del hogar concept to keep women in the private sphere, while equality discourse used motherhood as a proof to argue that women’s involvement in the public world was advantageous to society” (98).
feminism. The identification of this particular issue as key to Spanish feminist ideology will both enhance our readings of women’s narratives, and illuminate the particularities of the first-wave feminist movement in Spain. As we shall see, first-wave Spanish feminism was far from political, and women focused less on equal political rights (like suffrage) and more on socio-cultural reforms. Consequently, women’s narratives written during this time promise to expand our vision of first-wave Spanish feminism beyond that which is based on a specific quantity of political rights earned at a particular moment.

By the early twentieth century a greater number of Spanish women were able to read and write, having received a much improved education as a result of late nineteenth century reforms. The effects of these advances were visible in the literary world, especially in popular revistas and novellas, where women had the opportunity to represent themselves and their life roles in greater numbers than ever before. Women writers promptly created female protagonists who struggled with or debated the merits of marriage and motherhood, especially given the new opportunities available to them in their increasingly modern society (in which studying, traveling, and working within the public sphere were no longer exclusively male privileges). In particular, the quintessential female experiences of maternity and motherhood came to life in the pages of both fiction and non-fiction in distinct and varied ways. New sets of female heroines emerged that began to challenge not only the

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3 See Scanlon (15-57), Mangini (Las modernas de Madrid 34-73), and Davies (14-18) for details regarding the development of women’s education in Spain during the nineteenth -and twentieth- centuries. Mangini credits the Krausist movement with instigating the push for widespread women’s education: “Las iniciativas más avanzadas para la educación de la mujer datan de 1868 y fueron llevadas a cabo por los llamados krausistas” (35). Furthermore, the Krausist line of thought during this “revolutionary period of 1868-75,” viewed women’s education as essential to the progress of the nation, given that they would inevitably mold its future citizens (Johnson, Gender and Nation 15). Despite the fact that Krausist ideals still maintained some traditional values, such as gendered separate spheres, “they were important means of consciousness-raising” for Spanish society (16). Johnson further points to an 1892 conference in Madrid as “an ideological turning point,” due to the fact that women not only attended, but gave speeches on topics ranging from improved and equal education for women, and women’s right to access all careers and professions (17).
restrictive, institutional discourse behind the *ángel del hogar*, but also the latent biological discourse which aimed to make synonymous, and prove natural, the identities of woman and mother. Narratives dealing explicitly with female protagonists attempting to negotiate both the traditional social expectations placed upon them, as well as their own personal desires regarding marriage, motherhood, and personal autonomy, appeared in great numbers throughout the United States and Europe. Carmen de Burgos, Margarita Nelken, and Federica Montseny are among the most prolific women writers in early twentieth-century Spain, and each contributed profoundly to the new and ongoing debates regarding marriage and motherhood at the height of first-wave feminism in the peninsula. In particular, these women became involved in the gradual transformation of the ideology that promoted the conventional roles of wife and mothers as women’s natural duty, or obligation. In novels, novellas and essays, these female authors presented their readers with new ways of thinking about motherhood and marriage, portraying these traditionally inevitable female destinies as merely one set of possibilities among many.

The present dissertation will examine these complexities within Spain’s nascent feminist movement in order to broaden current perspectives concerning the scope of first-wave feminism in the peninsula. Specifically, this study will investigate representations of maternity and motherhood in the fictional narratives of three Spanish women: Carmen de

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4 In the United States, Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) were popular, yet controversial, examples of this tendency. In Italy, Sibilla Aleramo published the fictionalized auto-biography entitled *A Woman* (1906), and in England the short-story “Bliss” (1920) was penned by Katharine Mansfield, and the well-known modernist novel *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) by Virginia Woolf.

5 Also important are Concha Espina, María Lejárraga (Gregorio Martínez Sierra), and Rosa Chacel, each of whom contributed to the growing body of women’s literature with their novels and essays (Lejárraga also composed drama, though she collaborated with her husband, even using his name, rather than her own). Additionally, poets like Ernestina Champourcín, María Teresa León, Carmen Conde, and Concha Méndez (contemporaries of the so-called “Generación de ‘27”) were no less important, and they published numerous collections of poetry in popular venues during the twenties and thirties.
Burgos (1867-1932), Margarita Nelken (1896-1968), and Federica Montseny (1905-1994). These three individuals were among the increasing number of educated women who began to earn their living by writing about those women’s issues which provoked conversation and debate within the increasingly visible Spanish feminist movement. Importantly, Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny did not only write literary fiction, but they transcended genres by penning novels and short novellas, as well as non-fiction essays and critical articles for popular journals, periodicals and revistas. As such, they are emblematic of the way in which Spanish women began to articulate their unique voices within a variety of public literary domains. In their novels and essays, Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny labored to mitigate anti-feminist attempts to unilaterally define an idealized model of female identity based on motherhood. By taking control of the representations and theorizations of the maternal role through literature, these women challenged, deconstructed, and even expanded upon the homogenous ángel del hogar in order to create exceptional, heterogeneous interpretations of motherhood which could accommodate a variety of roles and identities.

First-Wave Spanish Feminism: Similarities and Differences within Western Europe

During the early decades of the twentieth century, the ambitious goals of what historians and scholars refer to as “first-wave feminism” had become increasingly prevalent in England, the United States, and many other Western European countries. In Spain

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6 In her book, In Their Time: A History of Feminism in Western Society (2001), Marlene LeGates defines “first-wave feminism” as the term used by historians to describe the movement beginning in the early to mid-nineteenth century and extending into the early decades of the twentieth century, before giving way to “second-wave feminism,” which appeared in the late 1960s. From her study, the term first-wave feminism is generally used to refer to feminist activity taking place between the 1850s and the 1960s. Specifically, LeGates focuses on the movements in North America and Western Europe in which middle-class women began forming “sophisticated organizations in an attempt to achieve personal autonomy and exert influence on public life” (232). She highlights the following issues as objects of attack by first-wave feminists: “the male monopoly of education, professional careers, and culture; married women’s economic and legal dependence; sexual and
however, this early feminist movement manifested itself quite uniquely. Specifically, first-wave Spanish feminism has been described by modern scholars as delayed, weak, and overly conservative. The notion of delay, or of a late-awakening to feminist ideology, is in fact recurrent in studies of first-wave feminism in the Spanish context.\(^7\) Several factors advanced this common characterization. First, the overwhelming influence wielded by Catholicism—over Spanish women in particular—played an important role in the slow progress of the women’s movement.\(^8\) Secondly, and compounding this religious factor, Shirley Mangini highlights the intense pedagogical impetus behind much of first-wave feminist activity in Spain. She observes that improved women’s education, not female suffrage, was the catalyst that began to propel the movement (Las modernas 93).\(^9\) As a result of this pedagogical focus and the prevalence of traditional, Catholic ideology, unlike other Western feminist activists, many Spanish women who identified as feminists did not fight, at least initially, for increased moral double standards; women’s lack of control over their bodies; the drudgery of housework; low wages; and, not least, women’s exclusion from politics” (197).

\(^7\) In her comprehensive study of the development of Spanish feminism, Geraldine Scanlon highlights the delay of the Spanish movement in comparison to those which occurred in other western European nations. Specifically, she points out that despite the fact that feminism was a frequent topic in journal and newspapers articles, as well as public conferences during the first few years of the twentieth century, it was not until the end of the 1920s that Spanish women began to organize themselves into groups proposing coherent programs of reform (4-5). For Scanlon, by the time feminism “arrived” in Spain, it appeared domesticated when compared to the radical struggles and demonstrations of suffragettes in other countries during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (“Cuando el feminismo llegó a España, ya había sido domesticado.”) (196) Catherine Davies describes this early wave of Spanish feminism as “above all, conservative and passive” (“Feminist Writers” 193). Elsewhere, Davies has suggested that Spanish feminism was delayed and weakened by many factors, resulting in a “pattern of retardation followed by a sudden spurt of progressive activity […] in which] the forces of tradition hold back reform until breaking point” (Spanish Women’s Writing 5). Roberta Johnson employs the term “belated feminism” to refer to women’s literary activity during the early twentieth century (“Spanish Feminist Thought” 35), and also asserts that it was not until the 1920s when feminism could “truly be considered a movement in Spain” (Gender and Nation 27).

\(^8\) Geraldine Scanlon credits the Catholic Church with playing a fundamental role in delaying feminist activity in the peninsula: “No cabe duda de que la aplastante influencia de la religión católica en España, especialmente sobre las mujeres, desempeñó un importante papel en el retraso del nacimiento del movimiento feminista” (159). Michael Ugarte also discusses the power wielded by the Catholic Church to influence women’s social consciousness in his discussion of Carmen de Burgos’s work (“Carmen de Burgos” 62). Additionally, Inmaculada Blasco’s observations are similar, and her study also reveals the Catholic Church and its influence over young women to be a crucial factor in the “retraso y debilidad” of first-wave feminism in Spain (10).

\(^9\) Mangini states: “La actitud de las españoles no correspondía con el feminismo anglosajón, lo cual ponía énfasis en el voto femenino. En España, la primera y más esencial meta era, según la burguesía un imprescindible movimiento pedagógico masivo para las mujeres españoles” (Las modernas 93).
political rights (like suffrage or access to wage labor in the public sphere). In this regard, historian Mary Nash has classified first-wave feminist activity in Spain as predominantly social in orientation (rather than political, like much of feminist activity in neighboring European countries, England, and the United States) ("Género" 20). Yet it is not merely present-day critics who have thusly categorized first-wave Spanish feminism. In 1919, the writer and intellectual Margarita Nelken expressed her clear preoccupations with the slow progress of the movement in Spain in her essay, *La condición social de la mujer en España*. She emphasizes the uniqueness of Spanish feminist activity, as well as its very recent development: “Aquí, en España, el feminismo es recientísimo: ha nacido, hace apenas unos años, bajo la presión, no de la lucha feminista de otros países, sino del éxito de esta lucha. Es el reflejo de un resultado” (33).

The intersection of these defining characteristics – delay, weakness or conservatism, and the noticeable privileging of social rather than political issues – demands attention, especially when subjecting Spanish women’s literary production of this time period to the analytical lens of contemporary feminist criticism. Historians have persistently identified two major strands in the first-wave women’s movement: maternal or social feminism, and liberal, or equal-rights feminism (LeGates 244). On the one hand, liberal feminists were inspired by the ideology of equal-rights and subscribed to the notion that all human beings shared essential similarities. Thus, they advocated essential human rights for all members of society, regardless of gender (such as suffrage and legislation to improve working conditions and wages). Maternal feminists, on the other hand, argued from the perspective of “difference” and encouraged women to recognize and defend the unique values of female culture and

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10 Throughout the first chapter of *La condición social*, Nelken reiterates the sentiment that Spanish feminism is recent, still in the process of developing, and ultimately distinct from the broader women’s movement in Western Europe: “[está] en el aire” (34); “Nuestro feminismo es reciente y es escaso” (35).
experiences (244-45). Most importantly, the concept of gender difference to which they ascribed was heavily rooted in women’s family situation and familial role (245). This understanding of difference is crucial to the Spanish context. Maryellen Bieder is quick to remind us of such Spanish specificities, noting that “in a culture that grounded gender construction in difference, not equality, feminism cannot be equated with the discourse of equality and the right to vote, the two underlying tenets of feminism in England and the United States” (“Modern Spanish Woman” 243). Given maternal feminists’ emphasis on “difference,” as well as their defense of motherhood and traditional female roles within the private sphere, many historians have dismissed this variety of first-wave feminism – going as far as to suggest that is was not really feminism at all. In this regard, maternal feminism is often presented as marginal, weak, or conservative when compared to the broader, more liberal-oriented feminist agenda based on equal-rights in Western countries.

It is essential to note, however, that many recent historians have in fact come to the defense of maternal feminism, noting that it was born of and fostered a distinct female political culture that wanted “nothing less than to redefine politics” and reject male categories (LeGates 248). Consequently, arguments in defense of maternal feminist ideology prove to be extremely pertinent to first-wave Spanish feminism. In the Western European context, Karen Offen has rightly noted that Europeans expressed their concerns differently than American women, and their goals went beyond those of access to male privilege and

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11 Maryellen Bieder’s observation concurs with Karen Offen’s description of European feminist movements. Offen suggests a specificity to European feminism that distinguished it from movements in England and the United States, given the emphasis on “elaborations of womanliness” (“Defining Feminism” 124).

12 LeGates discusses these critiques in the American and Western European context (247-56). See Nancy Cott’s article “What’s in a Name? The Limits of ‘Social Feminism’: or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women’s History,” for her critique of maternal feminism in the American context.
power (“Defining Feminism” 124). In her article, “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” Offen observes that many European women considered the language behind equal-rights to be insufficient, given that it essentially proposed the standard of male adulthood as the norm” (123). Offen identifies what she calls a “relational” mode of feminism among Western European women. She explains:

Relational feminism emphasized women’s rights as women (defined principally by their childbearing and/or nurturing capacities) in relation to men. It insisted on women’s distinctive contributions in these roles to the broader society and made claims on the commonwealth on the basis of these contributions. By contrast, the individualist feminist tradition of argumentation emphasized more abstract concepts of individual human rights and celebrated the quest for personal independence (or autonomy) in all aspects of life, while downplaying, deprecating, or dismissing as insignificant all socially defined roles and minimizing discussion of sex-linked qualities or contributions, including childbearing and its attendant responsibilities. (135-36)

The focus on women’s place within the family in the context of a “relational” mode of feminism – particularly on the subjects of motherhood and maternity – is fundamental to the issues which will come to the fore in the writings of first-wave Spanish feminists. However unlike LeGates’s and Offen’s fairly oppositional definitions (of liberal and maternal/social feminism, or relational and individualist feminism respectively), Spanish

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13 Offen also indicates that “Europeans focused as much or more on elaborations of womanliness; they celebrated sexual difference rather than similarity within a framework of male/female complementarity; and, instead of seeking unqualified admission to male-dominated society, they mounted a wide-ranging critique of the society and its institutions” (“Defining Feminism” 124).
women’s feminist ideology proves to be more nuanced. For example, even the more liberal of first-wave Spanish women frequently celebrated maternity, even as they aimed to redefine motherhood within their own feminist agendas and advocated for dramatic reforms of the current social order and legal codes. And unlike the liberal (equal-rights) agenda in neighboring countries, Spanish feminists did not downplay or dismiss women’s socially defined roles, nor did they minimize sex-linked qualities. In fact, the majority of Spanish women never entirely rejected or downgraded motherhood as a traditional female experience. Furthermore, though it may have shared some maternalist principles, Spanish feminism did not advocate maternal feminists’ belief that the values of the family should be extended to society. In fact, Montseny, and to a great extent Nelken and Burgos, were each quite critical of both the structure and function of the traditional nuclear family in the modernizing Spanish nation. Thus first-wave Spanish feminism exhibits hybrid characteristics that belie an oppositional model of liberal (equal-rights) versus maternal (social) orientation. These distinctive qualities of the first-wave movement in Spain certainly had important implications in the development of feminist consciousness in the peninsula.

14 Gisela Bock and Pat Thane’s collection of essays, Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s-1950s, concurs with my observation of Spanish feminist politics as it warns against overly simplifying the early twentieth century women’s movement through chronological (or other) categorization. Their essays aim to problematize, among other things, the “widespread assumption of a clear political and chronological divide – placed at different points in time in different countries – between the women’s movements that predominantly promoted individualism and ‘equal rights’ and those that promoted a supposedly less vigorous ‘maternalist’ or ‘relational’, ‘welfare,’ or ‘social’ feminism. As with the history of women generally, it can often be better understood on a local or regional level than on a national one” (3).

15 Mary Nash identifies the anarchist Lucía Sánchez Saornial as the first Spanish women to openly reject motherhood as a marker of female identity, proclaiming in 1935 that the maternal role represented complete subjugation of women to her biological process of reproduction (“Maternidad” 697-98). See Nash’s article, “Maternidad, maternología y reforma eugénica en España, 1900-1939” for more information.
The Maternal Dilemma and the Dilemma of Difference

Due to the importance motherhood wielded within Spanish women’s social and cultural consciousness, it is useful to consider Ann Taylor Allen’s historical research on motherhood and the first-wave feminist movement in Western Europe, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe (1890-1970). The Maternal Dilemma*. Allen’s historical observations will provide a crucial context for Burgos’s, Nelken’s, and Montseny’s literary output. Allen provides an international and comparative history of the feminist movement in western European nations from the perspective of motherhood and the family, two issues which are typically associated with women and the private sphere. She aims to illuminate the differences among nations, rather than obscure them (6-7). In particular, her study calls into question the negative judgments often directed towards “maternal feminists” by pointing to their many positive achievements, as well as the international trends which informed maternalist agendas. Allen begins her study with the example of Henrik Ibsen’s famous play, *A Doll’s House* (1879), in which the protagonist, Nora, feels extremely confined by and unsuited for the traditional domestic role expected of women: that of doting wife and mother. She experiences a revelation, in which she sees her life as a mere fantasy: “Our home has never been anything but a playroom. I’ve been your doll-wife, just as I used to be papa’s doll-child. And the children have been my dolls. I used to think it was fun…” (Ibsen 98). She ultimately leaves behind her husband and children in order to pursue her own individual desires, stating emphatically as she walks out of her home: “I must educate myself. And you can’t help me with that. It’s something I must do by myself. That’s why I’m leaving you” (99). Even more, when her husband argues that her most “sacred” duty is that towards her husband and children, that she is “first and foremost” a wife and mother, Nora counters: “I
have another duty which is equally sacred… My duty towards myself… I am first and foremost a human being” (100). This climactic ending provoked fervent debate and controversy, given that Nora ultimately refuses to obey her husband, leaves him, her home and her children, and yet Ibsen portrays her with great sympathy. The drama was extremely popular in Western Europe, and in London, among other cities, the play’s questionable “morality” and unsettling verisimilitude provoked intense public reaction as late as 1891.16

Even those outside the literary world expressed their opinions on Nora’s polemical decision (the noted misogynist German neurologist Paul J. Moebius even offers his own interpretation – and scathing analysis – in the second prologue to his study on the mental deficiency of women, for example).17 Allen, however, suggests that in reality Nora embodies the “maternal dilemma,” a term she deploys to describe the critical new question facing modern women in the era of first-wave feminism. The “maternal dilemma” was simply this: “is it possible to be both a mother and an autonomous individual?” (1, emphasis mine). In other words, for the first time, women began to recognize the gradual, but accelerating “redefinition of maternity from a lifetime identity to a role” (Allen 84, emphasis mine). It is crucial to keep in mind that the element of choice regarding motherhood had not been perceived as a realistic option before the twentieth century. Thus, the recognition of this traditional identity as an elective was crucial to the ideological shift which propelled the

16 Tracey Cecile Davis refers to an 1889 article in London’s Life magazine as being “fairly indicative” of critical and popular reception to the play, particularly as the controversy owed largely to the content of the third act: “A Doll’s House is a curious mixture of sham science, false morality, and genuine drama; and, as the false morality for the most part presented in a lump in the final portion of the last act, a perfectly acceptable play might be made out of it by a single act of amputation… From this point A Doll’s House becomes dramatically unsatisfactory, and morally absurd” (61). For details of the London debate amongst both sympathetic (Ibsenite) and unsympathetic (non-Ibsenite) theater-goers, see Davis’s dissertation, Critical and Popular Reaction to Ibsen in England (1872-1906) (55-81).

17 Moebius complains of the popularity of this play, emphasizing his disdain for the way in which critics and the public tended to celebrate the unconventional protagonist’s final polemic decision to abandon her life of domesticity as a wife and mother: “El mal está en que me corresponde hacer notar que el público ve una heroína en esta criatura degenerada, semi-loca, que abandona a sus hijos porque se imagina ser su deber perfeccionar su miserable yo” (Moebius 123-24).
maternal dilemma, “for without choice, there can be no dilemma” (Allen 1). In fact, many scholars today defend first wave feminists who celebrated maternity and motherhood by emphasizing the key role they played in social and legal reforms (Swedish reformer Ellen Key and French feminist Louise Koppe are two such examples) (Allen; Blasco; Bock and Thane). Additionally, these early twentieth-century feminists who emphasized women’s childbearing potential did not share a “‘normative’ conception of female nature… centered on motherhood,” but rather their views of the maternal role itself were “exceedingly diverse” (Allen 235). Despite the diversity of feminist views on motherhood, however, Allen points to two specific perceivable trends. First, the emphasis on motherhood was not based on an essentialist view which defined it as a biological destiny or a moral imperative, but rather on a more democratic interpretation of “motherhood as a role – an identity that was not innate but assumed, and might be refused or combined with other roles” (236). Secondly, perceptions of child-rearing also transitioned away from a basis of biologically determined female responsibility and towards a more scientific rationale. As a result, feminists noted that “though only mothers could bear children, the rearing of these children might… be entrusted

18 The essays in Gisela Bock and Pat Thane’s anthology, *Maternity and Gender Politics* (1991), draw attention to the way in which maternal feminists in many western European nations played a crucial role in the development of the welfare state and in the drastic improvements and reforms made in the areas of women’s and children’s health. For example, Buttafuoco explains the impact in Italy: “Arguing for the centrality of the maternal role in society meant foregrounding the responsibility of the state towards mothers and children as integral, essential elements of the nation itself” (180). Turning to France, Cova argues that, in fighting to make maternity fit into the workplace, “what appeared as pronatalism to Members of Parliament could appear as social feminism to mothers who profited from it” (132). In her article, “Defining Feminism,” Karen Offen has rejected the notion that maternal feminists harmed the early movement through their focus on family and motherhood, noting that the definition of feminism must be broadened in European contexts to include more than simply women’s activity in the public sphere and agitation for legal rights: “Europeans focused as much or more on elaborations of womanliness; they celebrated sexual difference rather than similarity within a framework of male/female complementarity; and, instead of seeking unqualified admission to male-dominated society, they mounted a wide-ranging critique of the society and its institutions” (124). Finally, Inmaculada Blasco’s study on Catholic feminist militancy in Spain, *Paradojas de la ortodoxia* (2003), highlights the crucial role catholic women’s groups played in affording women public spaces and mobilizing a fight for representation, thus challenging the separate spheres dichotomy which characterized the structure of the traditional nuclear family in Spanish culture (285).
to other adults, even to men” (236). In other words, women were becoming increasingly aware of the fact that, while motherhood was a uniquely female experience, it was also as a socially and culturally constructed institution.

Far from uniformly promoting (or rejecting) maternity, however, first-wave feminists sought to appropriate motherhood within new definitions of womanhood. Allen explains that “feminists who extolled motherhood as woman’s distinctive contribution to society […] had no intention of confining mothers to their conventional roles of dependent wife, domestic drudge, and sexual slave” (13). Though Spain occupies a peripheral position within Allen’s study, this particular observation is pertinent to the Spanish context as women like Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny (each of whom were at some point single mothers, either legally or practically) aimed to promote a balance between traditional maternal roles and modern professional commitments. Thus their goals were to illustrate how women might overcome their “maternal dilemmas” and realistically aspire to be both mothers and independent individuals. Choice, however, is the prominent feature in their discourses on motherhood; Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny embrace maternal choice, though predominantly in positive terms. That is, the maternal role must be understood as a proactive decision in which a

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19 Margarita Nelken, for example, was an advocate of innovative childrearing practices, and she especially aimed to disprove the notion that women’s sole social role is biologically determined to be nothing more than that of child bearer and caregiver. She identifies a great contradiction: if these biologically based theories are true, and woman’s singular social responsibility to bear and rear children is undoubtedly “natural,” then why should there such a need for the manuals that guide women on what to do both during pregnancy and after the birth of their children? And why do so many women enter marriage and motherhood with insufficient knowledge of their maternal responsibilities? (“Maternología y puericultura” 8-11). Carmen de Burgos also demonstrates her awareness that social and cultural conditioning, rather than any innate biological mechanism, was behind the insistence that women must dedicate their lives solely to raising their children in La mujer moderna y sus derechos. Federica Montseny similarly recognizes that motherhood within traditional marriages could be detrimental to women’s abilities to achieve liberation, yet she identifies the institution of marriage, not motherhood, as the primary problem (“El problema de los sexos” 20-22).

20 During the Second-wave of feminist activity in the 1960s and 1970s, American poet, essayist, and feminist Adrienne Rich would make explicit this important distinction between motherhood as an institution and as an experience; or a potential relationship that women may have with their powers of reproduction or children (Of Women Born, 13).

21 See Allen; Bock and Thane; Offen (“Defining Feminism” and “Body Politics”); and LeGates.
woman voluntarily and willingly elects to have a child. The alternative, or the conscious rejection of the maternal role wherein a woman deliberately elects \textit{not} to have children, remained problematic in Spain. In Western Europe, Allen elaborates the bifurcate potential of both voluntary motherhood and conscious maternity (the decision to elect or reject motherhood):

By portraying motherhood as a choice that might sometimes be refused, these feminists did not downgrade its importance. Precisely because it was a choice, many asserted that it could for the first time become a vocation. […] Because these feminists believed that motherhood was a cultural construction that had evolved throughout prehistory and history, they insisted that the conditions under which women bore and raised children should and must change. (236)

In Spain, however, it was not until the thirties that a woman, the anarquist Lucía Sánchez Saornil, dared to openly reject maternity as a defining element of female identity. \textsuperscript{22} Until then, the concept of “maternidad consciente,” which we will observe in the advocacy of Burgos, Nelken and Montseny, tempered most challenges to this gendered-formulation.

The overt recognition of female difference and the acknowledgement and even celebration of maternal values, however, relied quite heavily on what Patricia DiQuinzio has referred to as “essential motherhood,” or “the ideological formation that specifies the essential attributes of motherhood and articulates femininity in terms of motherhood so

\textsuperscript{22} In her article “Maternidad, maternología y reforma eugénica en España, 1900-1939,” Nash explains: “Habría que esperar hasta los años treinta para encontrar de pluma de una mujer un rechazo abierto a esta definición de género. En el otoño de 1935 la anarquista Lucía Sánchez Saornil […] estableció, en las páginas de \textit{Solidaridad Obrera}, una abierta polémica con el discurso predominante de género basado, en gran medida, en los planteamientos de Marañón. Para Sánchez Saornil la definición de la mujer como madre representaba la subyugación de las mujeres a un proceso biológico: la reproducción” (697-98).
understood” (xiii). In *The Impossibility of Motherhood. Feminism, Individualism and the Problem of Mothering* (1999), DiQuinzio explains that essential motherhood stipulates that:

…mothering is a function of women’s essentially female nature, women’s biological reproductive capacities, and/or human evolutionary development. Essential motherhood construes women’s motherhood as natural and inevitable. It requires women’s exclusive and selfless attention to and care of children based on women’s psychological and emotional capacities for empathy, awareness of the needs of others, and self-sacrifice. (xiii)

DiQuinzio aims to theorize the complex relationship between individualism, essential motherhood, and feminism. Her work is thus especially useful when approaching the literature produced by our third writer, Federica Montseny, who was a vocal anarcho-individualist, and anarcho-feminist. More than Burgos and Nelken, Montseny celebrated motherhood while struggling to achieve social reforms from an individualist and libertarian orientation. Furthermore, while we have seen that Allen’s “maternal dilemma” highlights the material and psychological difficulties facing women who recognized their potential to be *both* a mother and an autonomous individual, DiQuinzio points to the subsequent “dilemma of difference” which feminist women inevitably encounter once they do make the choice to embrace the so-called “traditional” maternal role. The “dilemma of difference” refers to the way in which:

… feminism and feminist theory must deny or disavow women’s difference, and differences among women, in order to argue for women’s equality and to mobilize women as a group, but must also rely on the concept of difference to
analyze the specificity of women’s situations and experiences and to theorize differences among women. (xv)

This dilemma is manifest in a number of paradoxes concerning embodiment, gender, and representation, which become most salient and most difficult to resolve at the site of mothering (xv). In early twentieth-century Spanish culture, we will see clearly that the majority of feminists, including Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny, acknowledged women’s difference from men, yet they were also notably cognizant of the unique attributes of and situations facing individual women.

DiQuinzio ultimately argues that “essential motherhood” is inadequate for conceptualizing motherhood in individualist terms: “[I]t is impossible to be a mother in the sense implied by the notion of motherhood, which suggests an essential identity or state of being… This impossibility of motherhood means that all attempts to theorize mothering inevitably encounter and must negotiate the dilemma of difference” (xv). Through her reading of various feminist accounts of mothering (from Beauvoir, to Kristeva, to Rich, to Ruddick), DiQuinzio concludes that the benefits of recognizing difference outweigh the risks, especially for the purpose of theorizing mothering. She suggests that feminists (and by extension I would include those women like Montseny who advocate on behalf of women but, as we will observe, actually deny a feminist label), must “accept the inevitability of the dilemma of difference and its resulting paradoxes in theorizing mothering, and thus must embrace, or at least reconcile itself to… a ‘paradoxical politics of mothering’” (DiQuinzio xv). These astute observations, drawn from intensive research and analyses of the most prominent voices of Western feminism throughout the twentieth century, are pertinent to Burgos’s, Nelken’s, and especially Montseny’s 1920s project. Each of these women built the
foundation of her feminist agenda on the recognition of women’s difference – specifically, the biological particularity which allows women to bear children – and thus they each theorize motherhood in terms of this difference. They explore the paradoxes, contradictions, and even shortcomings of a difference-based feminism (or in Montseny’s case, a “feminist” individualism) through an array of fictional female protagonists and carefully crafted socio-cultural analyses of the diverse situations and conditions facing their female contemporaries in Spain.

The Survival and Enduring Influence of La perfecta casada and the Ángel del hogar

For many Western women at the turn of the century, and for Spanish women in particular, feminine identity was still very closely tied to motherhood. Julia Kristeva traces this prescriptive identity construct back to Biblical times, and the subsequent veneration of the virgin mother (“Stabat Mater”), and Adrienne Rich perceives the beginnings of this restrictive maternal role even earlier: at the onset of “patriarchal monotheism” (119). In Spain, the ángel del hogar had been the preferred female role for centuries, and literature further ensured and reinforced its immortality. Popularized by Fray Luis de Leon’s sixteenth century conduct manual, La perfecta casada (1583), the ángel del hogar served as a female role model for centuries of Spanish women. This “angel of the home,” was crafted on the basis of patriarchal preferences which defined a woman’s primary social role as that of wife and mother within an institutionalized marriage. Fray Luis’s manual instructed women towards the fulfillment of this idealized, prescriptive role as a self-sacrificing, dedicated,

23 Sandra J. Schumm similarly points out that, according to archaeological evidence, women in some ancient civilizations often had more influence and garnered more respect for their leadership and intuition than women in today’s societies (ix). She suggests that “the advent of patriarchal cultures diminished the importance of the mother…. Likewise, women’s role became inferior, degraded” (ix).
wholly domestic, wife and mother. Though rooted in centuries of tradition, this role
nevertheless enjoyed a resurgence in late nineteenth-century Spain (Jagoe and Enríquez, 25-
26). At this time, an enormous range of print literature (feminine magazines, conduct
manuals, novels, school programs, legislation, medical texts, etc), like María del Pilar Sinués
de Marco’s Él angel del hogar (1859), similarly defined the model woman as a wife and
mother who would act in a saintly, angelic manner, educating her children and making the
home a pleasing space for her husband (23-24).24 Importantly, the image of the ángel del
hogar relied heavily, albeit indirectly, on women’s biology to assist in defining a Spanish
women’s proper place in the home as child-bearer and mother. Shirley Mangini points to the
way in which “the myth” of the ángel del hogar further reinforced the gendered division
between the private (women’s) and public (men’s) spheres by establishing a series of
dichotomies that made traditional laws governing women’s appropriate social behavior all
the more rigid (Las modernas 25). For example, in the late nineteenth century and even into
the early years of the twentieth, it was only acceptable for women to leave the home if they
were attending mass or performing charitable work; thus a working, married woman was
viewed as an embarrassment to her husband, and single working women might be mistaken
for, or treated as, prostitutes.25 As a result, these close ties between woman and mother – and

24 According to Jagoe and Enríquez, “En su aplastante mayoría, estas publicaciones declaran que las
ocupaciones apropiadas para la mujer – su ‘misión’, en el lenguaje de la época – son el matrimonio, la
maternidad y la domesticidad. A este respecto, los autores se inscriben dentro de una larga tradición de
recomendaciones patriarcales para que las actividades de la mujer se limitasen a las esfera de la casa y la
reproducción” (24). Jagoe and Enríquez do emphasize a significant change in the nineteenth century discourse
as compared to that of the early modern conduct manuals: in the nineteenth century, woman was no longer
considered morally or mentally inferior to men (as the Aristotelian tradition had established), but rather morally
superior (24-27). Her role as the angel in the home would tame and quell the sinful nature of men: “En el siglo
XIX vemos cómo este discurso [Aristotélico] pierde su aceptación social; poco a poco desaparece la inveterada
costumbre de publicar juicios negativos acerca de las mujeres en general … [No] es la mujer sino el hombre el
que es el pecador empedernido, el ser caído, la carne débil: ‘la mujer’ se conceptualaba como un ser moralmente
superior por su abnegación y su capacidad para amar, perdonar y consolar” (25-26).
25 Mangini explains that the survival of “el mito del ángel del hogar…estableció una serie de dicotomías que
harían mucho más rígidas las leyes tradicionales en cuanto a la mujer” (Las modernas 25). Women who left the
the subsequent reverence and praise for this domestic role—established a conflation of feminine identities that was not only prevalent, but the preferred model of womanhood in Spain at the turn of the twentieth century. Soon, however, the rapid changes occurring in modern, industrial nations allowed women to challenge, for the first time, the existing, traditional paradigm of female character based almost exclusively on motherhood.

Problematically, however, we have seen that the traditional maternal role which contributed to the model ángel del hogar was never entirely replaced or rejected in Spain, even within certain sectors of the more outspoken feminist movement itself. While it was certainly questioned and even weakened by a new discourse on gender—specifically the “nueva mujer moderna” who would leave the home, enter the public sphere, and contribute to society as an independent citizen (Larson xv)—it never disappeared. Pointing to the two most prevalent female archetypes during the 1920s, historian Mary Nash explains: “En este periodo la imagen y la representación cultural de la mujer pasó de la tradicional figura de ‘Ángel del Hogar’ o ‘Perfecta Casada’, a la de ‘Mujer Nueva’ o ‘Mujer Moderna’ (“Maternidad” 687). However Nash points out that, despite the apparent modifications made to the traditional Ángel del Hogar paradigm, “el nuevo prototipo de feminidad – la ‘Mujer Moderna’ – mantenía intacto uno de los ejes constitutivos del discurso tradicional de la domesticidad al asentar la maternidad como base esencial de la identidad cultural de la mujer” (688). Moreover, Nash acknowledges that while most approaches to the ángel del hogar at this time were “ambivalent” at the very least, the ideological stance on motherhood home in order to work were considered “una vergüenza para la familia porque significaba que el patriarca de la casa no ganaba lo suficiente para mantener a su mujer o a su hija aisladas de los peligros… del mundo de los hombres” (26). In fiction, Carmen de Burgos makes this division evident in La rampa (1917), where she illustrates the disrespectful, abusive treatment that single working women frequently endured when navigating the public sphere. Her language even suggests that the negative perception of independent, working women paralleled those attitudes directed towards prostitutes.
which the paradigm contained did indeed yield “a positive conception of women’s social
worth and women’s contribution to the family” (Defying 11). Nevertheless, feminists like
Burgos, Nelken and Montseny were quick to point to the contradictions populating the social
landscape of a culture that purportedly valued women’s contribution to families and the
domestic space, while simultaneously denying them the right to control their own
reproductive capacities, their marriage (or divorce), or their ability to raise a child
independently. Furthermore, if the ángel del hogar represented the epitome of Spanish
womanhood, then women were excluded and discouraged from participating in an array of
newfound opportunities within the public space. These three authors, and many of their
educated female contemporaries, promptly came to critically question the reductionist
tendencies of this female role.

Anti-feminist Appropriations of Feminist “Difference” Discourse

During these early decades of the twentieth century, educated women writers and
journalists like Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny were not the only women who experienced
increased visibility in the public sphere. Many others began to enter the workforce and earn
their own income. In fact, many modern women had become part of the workforce in large
numbers during and after the First World War, and their presence in the public sphere had
grown considerably by the 1920s as a result of the increased production which the war effort
demanded.26 Not surprisingly, men began to consider this increased female presence in the

26 While Spain remained neutral, Rosa María Capel Martínez credits the First World War and the accompanying
new phase of industrialization with dramatically increasing the number of women who entered the workforce in
Spain, pointing out that during the first decade of the twentieth century, Spanish women in the labor force were
still a minority (132). However, Capel Martínez does explain that in both the textile and the tobacco industry,
women were a significant presence as early as the eighteenth century: ‘Both sectors stand out in the process of
initiating Spanish women into the world of the factory. Female textile workers were noteworthy for their large
numbers: 51,519 in 1900; 127,321 in 1930. Figures for female tobacco workers are lower: 21,317 for 1902;
work-place, in print media (like popular *revistas*), and in the public sphere in general, as a double-threat: first to their own jobs, and second to the ideological principles that structured the traditional family as it was defined and valued by western patriarchal societies.

Furthermore, at the turn of the century Spain entered a conflicted epoch marked by both rapid modernization and industrialization, as well as gradual decline sparked by the loss of overseas territories. In this atmosphere, anxieties ran high concerning the inevitable social, political, and cultural changes.

As a result, traditional forces reemerged with new vigor, revealing the extent to which these modern anxieties were directed towards women. Just as the popularity of feminist ideals began to take hold and women began voicing their concerns, conservative and traditional institutions gradually began to co-opt select women’s issues for their own anti-feminist agendas. In efforts to counteract this perceived feminine threat that the growing women’s movement represented, men and institutions (both social and political) labored to construct a powerful counter-argument which would significantly hinder women’s path to emancipation. The construction of these quite misogynist arguments relied heavily upon biological, scientific, and religious discourses of gender differentiation, each of which shared the common thread of defining women almost exclusively by way of their child-bearing potential. As a result, motherhood indeed became a distinguishing factor in feminist debates in Spain, and its prevalence as an ideological force within Spanish society contributed in an important way to both feminist and anti-feminist discourses surrounding women’s rights and social change.

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12,570 for 1930. However, women workers in tobacco factories achieved a virtual monopoly of jobs. Thus, cigarette and cigar making constituted the first all-female industry in Spain’ (132).

27 See Mangini’s chapter entitled “Modernas y misoginia” for information regarding the anti-feminist backlash against many *mujeres modernas*, particularly in Madrid (*Las modernas* 74-112). Scanlon also covers these anti-feminist and misogynist impulses in her chapter, “Fuentes de autoridad del antifeminismo” (159-94).
The inclusion of motherhood as an issue within anti-feminist discourse proved most problematic, for many Spanish feminist women embraced the concept of “difference,” or of women’s unique female experiences, contributions, and qualities (especially through their maternity and potential role as mothers) in order to argue on behalf of women’s rights and social reform. Discourses mobilized by anti-feminists, however, appropriated this same rhetoric with the aim of disrupting this burgeoning movement for women’s emancipation (Scanlon; Mangini, Las modernas). Scanlon names science and religion as the worst offenders, but also notes that philosophy and literature were similarly implicated in the dissemination of anti-feminist ideology (159-94). Relying on the positivist discourses in science and medicine, scientists, doctors, and philosophers aimed to provide indisputable truths which would prove either woman’s innate inferiority, or her natural and obligatory social function as child-bearer and mother, thus striving to justify her “proper” place in the private sphere as dutiful wives and mothers.28 Even government institutions openly promoted this counter-discourse against the feminist movement and women’s rights. As Mangini notes, “los gobiernos posbélicos querían orden y repoblación. Eso implicaba la vuelta de la mujer a su papel natural: el de madre y ama de casa” (Las modernas 74). As a result, women who had entered the workforce during the tumultuous years of World War I were suddenly attacked as radical, anti-family feminists, and encouraged to return to their “proper” place in the home to care for their husbands and children. This post-war rhetoric infuriated many feminists, like Burgos, who resented what she perceived to be the unfair

28 According to Mangini, “Lo que más legitimó el debate ante las aberraciones físicas, sexuales, y psicológicas de la mujer nueva/moderna eran los escritos de los misóginos ‘informados’: médicos, sociólogas, investigadores, científicos, y pedagogos” (Las modernas 99). Mangini cites Paul Julius Moebius, a German neurologist, as one of the worst offenders for his publication of La inferioridad mental de la mujer, which was translated and published in Spain in 1903 by none other than Carmen de Burgos. Additionally, Mangini references Gregorio Marañón and his biological discussion of “el problema feminista” in Biología y feminismo (1920), in which he concludes that women are maternal by nature, and they should therefore aim to be mothers above all else (103-04).
portrayal of feminism as the “enemigo del hombre, que disolvía el hogar y constituía la negación del amor” (*La mujer moderna* 65). Nelken similarly objected to this argument, countering that both men and the family (as well as humanity in general) would reap the benefits of a successful women’s movement (*La condición* 42). While the feminist question had been an effective way to adapt women to social changes and provide them with new opportunities to work in the public domain, it was clear in early twentieth-century Spain that these new possibilities and freedoms had not completely displaced the traditional female identity based largely on the private/familial sphere. In fact, in many of the aforementioned counter-feminist discourses, this restrictive traditional female role re-emerged with new vigor as a romanticized ideal heralded by patriarchal institutions in response to the gaining popularity of the modern women’s movement.29

Spain’s extremely conservative, Catholic society further complicated efforts to establish a coherent feminist movement, and the powerful Church exacerbated the difficulties presented by the distinctly social focus and delayed onset of Spanish feminism. The enduring political influence wielded by this institution, over Spanish women in particular, set the stage for unique varieties of feminism.30 For example, the Catholic Church aimed to promote motherhood and reinforce the conventional ángel del hogar paradigm, not as a voluntary female role that might be chosen, but as a Catholic woman’s obligatory duty to her husband, family, church, and state.31 Ultimately, the goal was to maintain tradition and prevent

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29 Much of the rhetoric surrounding the ángel del hogar is rooted in *La perfecta casada*, written by Fray Luis de León in 1583. As a conduct manual, this text dictated that the honorable, respectable woman was one who fulfilled her duties as a hard-working, self-sacrificing wife and mother, becoming a veritable angel in the home.

30 From her extensive research on the feminist movement in Spain, Scanlon definitively corroborates my assessment, once again pointing out the delayed onset of first-wave Spanish feminism: “No cabe duda de que la aplastante influencia de la religión católica en España, especialmente sobre las mujeres, desempeñó un importante papel en el retraso del nacimiento del movimiento feminista” (159).

31 See Scanlon’s discussion of Feminism and the Right (212-24), specifically the goals and principles behind Christian and Catholic “feminism” (220-23).
women’s liberation. While Catholic women’s groups like the Asociación Católica de la Mujer, or even the Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Españolas (La ANME) lauded motherhood and celebrated maternity, they nevertheless pressed for the preservation of the same social order implied by the ángel del hogar paradigm. In line with the Church’s teachings, they denied divorce, refused advocating for birth control or conscious motherhood, and favored maintaining the label “illegitimate” to classify children born out of wedlock.\textsuperscript{32} In fact, the Church’s firm opposition to divorce in actuality garnered significant support from women, who were assured that they were valiantly defending the sacred sacrament of marriage against the blasphemous and irreverent attacks of atheists.\textsuperscript{33} But the social reforms rejected by these Catholic women’s groups were precisely those which were most important to Burgos, Nelken, Montseny, and those women who advocated “maternidad consciente,” or “voluntary motherhood.”\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{32} La ANME was one of the most important feminist groups in Spain, and was indeed “firmemente católica” (Scanlon 26). Though it attempted to maintain an independent position and avoid collaboration with those groups purporting to defend women, in reality it defended religious interests (206). For example, La ANME did not collaborate with Catholic syndicates, nor with the right-wing groups who supported women’s suffrage as a way to strengthen their own party (206). The conservative roots of La ANME were evident predominantly by what issues were absent from their agenda: divorce, birth control, and a refusal to eliminate the concept of “illegitimate” children born out of wedlock (207).

\textsuperscript{33} Scanlon explains: “La iglesia contó con un considerable apoyo femenino en su campaña en contra del matrimonio civil y del divorcio… les asegura que sus nombres pasarán a la historia de la España católica por su valiente defensa del sacramento del matrimonio frente a los ataques de los impíos y ateos. Más tarde, las mujeres españolas respondieron entusiásticamente a la llamada de las mujeres católicas italianas para que se unieran a ellas en sus oraciones a fin de evitar que cayera sobre ellas el desastre del divorcio” (147). Scanlon further points out Margarita Nelken’s criticism of this mobilization of women, in which the writer and intellectual insists that women defend the prohibition of divorce in order to ensure their own economic stability in traditional, indissoluble marriages. For more information see Nelken’s \textit{La condición social de la mujer en España} (265-69).

\textsuperscript{34} Despite the fact that the agendas of these Catholic women’s groups do not align with those of the feminist authors in this study, it is worth noting Inmaculada Blasco’s recent positive evaluation of the impact that these conservative Catholic women’s groups actually had in Spain: “Las asociaciones de mujeres católicas y seglares compartieron su carácter de entidades modernas, cuya tendencia era crear organizaciones de ámbito nacional, centralizadas y de masas. Su novedad residía también en que intentaron superar los límites de una acción meramente caritativa y piadosa, y contribuyeron a la politicización de las mujeres católicas” (285). Here again we observe recent scholarship that questions the generally accepted notion that conservative, Catholic women did not in fact contribute (or may have even harmed) the women’s movement in Spain. Even though their goals may have been less revolutionary than their more liberal (generally secular) feminist contemporaries, these
In 1931 women were finally awarded the right to vote, and at this time the Church became even more involved in Spain’s political climate, thus further complicating the feminist scene. The Church quickly supported women’s suffrage (despite its continued staunch opposition to other social reforms like divorce and birth control) as a means through which the institution might gain political influence by mobilizing its most devout female parishioners. In response, many liberal feminists who were not members of the Catholic Church (including Nelken and Montseny, for example) did not support women’s suffrage on the grounds that many uneducated, conservative women influenced by their faith would be guided by the whims of their husbands or confessors. Nelken was particularly suspicious of the Church’s motives. She describes how practicing Catholic women are “interrogated” by their confessors regarding their political ideas, then guided and advised accordingly such that they will support the Church’s goals (*La mujer* 21). The fact that even a basic political and social right like suffrage was debated by competing parties – advocated and encouraged by the Church and conservative Catholic women (especially once the right was granted in 1931), yet rejected by the most liberal feminists – speaks to the unique characteristics of the struggle for women’s rights in Spain.

**Women’s Representation and Participation in Literature: Social Modernism**

The Spanish literature produced during this time clearly reflects the complex interaction between such vocal feminist and anti-feminist impulses in the nation. In fiction, women as mothers appeared with frequency in the novels and *novellas* by both male and women nevertheless challenged some very core beliefs and values of Spanish society simply by mobilizing and uniting for a common female cause within a public space.
female writers during the early decades of the twentieth century. Roberta Johnson’s revisionist approach to the Spanish literary history, *Gender and Nation in the Spanish Modernist Novel* (2003), suggests that “nation, family, women, and marriage informed the canonical Spanish modernist novel as well as noncanonical fiction to a larger extent than has heretofore been acknowledged” (9). Johnson points out that, despite the fact that male and female novelists wrote in different spheres and for a unique reading public, they shared the same concerns for what role Spanish tradition, and traditional domestic arrangements, would play in “the past, present and future of Spain as a nation” (viii). Thus gender informed their view of Spanish society. The majority of Spanish men, however, tended to depict women who challenged tradition as eccentric, mentally unstable and ill, weak, or even immoral. These male-authored texts often constructed motherhood according to the ángel del hogar framework. As such, maternity and motherhood not only represented the pinnacle of a woman’s existence, but also her ultimate contribution to her husband, family and society. Correspondingly, sterility was portrayed as a supreme curse, punishment, or tragedy. Male-authored literary discourses, then, served to buttress both the Catholic Church’s continued

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35 Johnson’s *Gender and Nation* highlights numerous literary manifestations of the family, focusing largely on marriage and gender roles in both male- and female-authored novels. The figure of the mother is present in her study, though not analyzed in depth.

36 Novels by male authors featuring a female protagonist (or antagonist) as mother, or potential mother, include *Sonata de otoño* (1902) by Ramón del Valle-Inclán; *La tía Tula* (1907; 1921) and *Niebla* (1914), by Miguel de Unamuno; *La hiperestésica* (1931) and other novellas by Ramón Gómez de la Serna; and the well-known theatrical productions of Federico García Lorca, *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (1936), *Yerma* (1934), *Bodas de Sangre* (1932), to name a few. See Johnson (*Gender and Nation*) for a more comprehensive list of such male-authored texts.

37 Galdós’s *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1887) and Lorca’s *Yerma* (1934) are likely the most well-known examples of literature dealing with the figure of the barren woman, or the tragedy of women’s infertility. However Margot A. Versteeg has noted that Emilia Pardo Bazán dealt with the issue of infertility (seen as a women’s problem) in several short stories, including “La estéril” (1892), “Sara y Agar” (1894), “El belén” (1899), “Aventura” (1899) and “Leliña” (1903) (39-40). In these cuentos, “se plantea el conflicto entre el deseo de maternidad y la realidad estéril de la protagonista” (39). According to Versteeg, Pardo Bazán did attempt to challenge, if only subtly, “el menosprecio que merecieron en su época las mujeres sin hijos” (39).
elevation of Mary as the model, saintly mother that faithful women should aspire to emulate, as well as the of the ángel del hogar and the perfecta casada.

By the turn of the century, in fact, young women were once again receiving copies of Fray Luis’s republished La perfecta casada upon announcing their engagements. As an iconic literary and cultural representation of long-held Spanish traditions, La perfecta casada exerted significant influence over middle- and upper-class women who were encouraged to embody this venerated female archetype. Accordingly, Silvia Tubert has underscored the power that depictions of mothers and maternity in art and literature (as core components of the “symbolic order of culture”) exercise on the formation, propagation and acceptance of socio-cultural norms:

El orden simbólico de la cultura crea determinadas representaciones, imágenes o figuras atravesadas por relaciones de poder […] Las representaciones o figuras de la maternidad, lejos de ser un reflejo o un efecto directo de la maternidad biológica […] tienen un enorme poder reductor – todos los posibles deseos de las mujeres son sustituidos por uno: el de tener un hijo – y uniformador – en tanto la maternidad crearía una identidad homogénea de todas las mujeres. (9)

But not all women experienced motherhood in the same way, and many early twentieth-century Spanish women began to recognize and protest the insufficiencies and limitations inherent in hegemonic maternal representations.

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38 English translation (mine): “The symbolic order of culture creates specific representations, images, or figures which are intersected by power relations […] The representations or figures of maternity, far from being a reflection or a direct effect of biological maternity […] have an enormous reductionist [power] – all the possible desires of women are substituted for one: that of having a child – and standardizing power – inasmuch as maternity would create a homogenous identity for all women” (Tubert, Figuras de la madre 9).
Accompanying women’s gradually transforming perception of motherhood was a notable discursive transformation apparent in both literary fiction and non-fiction. In order to combat the prevalence of anti-feminist impulses and agendas, Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny, as well as Rosa Chacel and Concha Espina, were among the female authors who began to exert control over the cultural representations of women, especially by expanding the portrayals of motherhood and maternity within literature. These women writers engaged in what Johnson refers to as “social modernism,” a term which is critical for the contextualization of the literature explored in this present study. Johnson utilizes the phase “social modernism” to refer to:

…a mode that focuses on interpersonal relations within formal and informal social parameters. Women’s fiction, although less aesthetically innovative than male fiction, was known for its presentation of themes such as women’s social roles and unconventional sexual arrangements that were revolutionary by comparison to male novelists’ treatment of the subject. Unlike elitist male fiction, women’s fiction was often published in popular venues. (Gender and Nation vii-viii)

Johnson argues that critics have overlooked many of these socially-themed narratives in favor of the more abstract and philosophical forms of literature produced in elite circles. Within the framework of “social modernism,” however, we are able to understand the way in which women like Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny “enlisted fiction in a fairly realist mode to promote a more progressive nation where women would be men’s equals and marriage would mean partnership rather than oppression” (224). Women’s concerns differed
significantly from those of their more prominent male contemporaries.  

Specifically, the themes of motherhood and maternity surface repeatedly, largely owing to the fact that women’s reproductive capacity was central to both the feminist debate in Spain, and to the perdurable image of the traditional ángel del hogar.

Spanish feminists began to articulate their own unique vision of a progressive society by tackling maternal themes. During the 1920s in particular, Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny repeatedly depicted women as mother in their fiction and non-fiction, while also opting to redefine and broaden conventional maternal roles. This literary strategy suggests that early twentieth century Spanish women writers were acutely aware of the modern “dilemma” surrounding motherhood. Unlike the aforementioned male-authored texts, Burgos’s, Nelken’s, and Montseny’s narratives exhibited innovations in maternal representation. They increasingly defined the mother-role as dependent on a variety of factors, including social surroundings, economic situations, women’s education, social class, and especially the woman’s individual decision(s) regarding both marriage and motherhood. Since the increasingly complex nuances of the maternal role within a modernizing society were problematically omitted from the dominant cultural representations of mothers, the literary representations of maternity and motherhood within women’s often overlooked fictional

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39 Nuria Crúz-Cámara observes this phenomenon as well in her article on Margarita Nelken, however she makes no mention of “motherhood” or “maternity” in her list of women-centered issues: “La ausencia de mujeres del canon literario de esta época ha provocado que la crisis de conciencia ante ‘el problema de España,’ central en escritores de las primeras décadas del siglo XX, como Unamuno, Ortega y Gasset o Baroja, se haya definido desde una perspectiva exclusivamente masculina. Por ello, cuestiones candentes en aquellos años, como, por ejemplo, el divorcio, los derechos civiles femeninos y la profesionalización de las mujeres, traídas a la luz pública por los emergentes movimientos feministas de la época, han desaparecido de los estudios clásicos sobre el panorama cultural y literario de las primeras décadas del siglo” (7-8).

40 As a result of this kaleidoscopic modern socio-cultural landscape, many male writers at the turn of the century tended to exhibit a “historical impulse” or an “obsession with the past” as a way of coping with the devastation which the transformation and erosion of traditional beliefs and customs had provoked (Johnson, Gender and Nation 3). However Allen emphasizes that most “feminists did not share this foreboding” and on the contrary, many women “rejoiced that they lived in an era when even such a formidable institution as patriarchy was open to questions” (3, 25).
narratives have the potential to shed much needed light on the early Spanish feminist movement.

*Tres mujeres modernas*: Carmen de Burgos (1867-1932), Margarita Nelken (1896-1968), and Federica Montseny (1905-1994)

While there are numerous women who engaged in both challenging and renovating the literary depictions of maternity and motherhood during the early twentieth century, Carmen de Burgos, Margarita Nelken, and Federica Montseny in particular were pioneers in the male-dominated world of early twentieth century Spanish literature, and each took a unique stance regarding political and social reform in Spain (democratic, socialist and anarchist respectively).41 Furthermore, each was actively writing and publishing during the prolific years spanning from modernismo through the vanguardia, yet they have been largely excluded from the Spanish literary canon, along with countless other women authors.42 In fact, Montseny, and to a lesser extent Nelken, are largely unknown to a great number of literary scholars who have instead focused on these women’s contemporary avant-garde male

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41 I have chosen these three authors, and omitted at least two frequently mentioned female authors of the period: Rosa Chacel and María Martínez-Sierra. First, Chacel utilized narrative techniques more closely associated with avant-garde aesthetics rather than realist fiction (Johnson, *Gender and Nation* 224). Secondly, she wrote for an intellectual elite and not the same “mass readership” for which many other women writers of the 1920s and 1930s wrote (like Burgos, Nelken and Montseny, for example) (Davies, *Spanish Women's Writing* 155). Consequently, Chacel’s primary interests were not “feminist or revolutionary politics” (155), but rather artistic and aesthetic innovation which served to articulate her philosophical positions regarding selfhood and existence (Johnson, *Gender and Nation* 211-19). María Martínez-Sierra also dealt extensively with women’s positions as mothers within the feminist movement, however her work also poses two problems for my framework. First, she wrote using her husband’s name, and while recent studies have confirmed that she did indeed author, or co-author, much of the material published under “Gregorio Martínez Sierra” (see Blanco), this unique element of authorship puts her work in a much different position than that of the other three authors. Secondly, as far as her “literary” production, Martínez-Sierra was better-known for theater and essays than for novels and novellas, thus placing her on the fringe of the genre in which Burgos, Nelken and Montseny prolifically participated.

42 Annette Kolodny describes the literary canon as a “fiction,” noting that it is constructed on inherent biases regarding what is considered historically or culturally relevant. As such, the canon can be revised by altering or extending what is deemed historically relevant, with the effect of “remodeling our literary history, past, present and future.” (302-04).
counterparts, or on the well-known, male-dominated Generations of ’98, ’14 and ’27.43

Within the last few decades, however, scholars have recognized the limiting affects of these generational categories, and women’s voices are beginning to receive much more attention.44

Some Hispanists have incorporated women’s voices within their studies of the literary trends and intellectual generations of early 20th century Spain.45 Others have dedicated their research to recovering and presenting the life and work of these women who wrote prolifically in a variety of literary outlets, and also participated in select intellectual circles, the labor force, politics, journalism, and even government.46 Even more importantly, both literary scholars and historians have begun to investigate the biographies and bibliographies of the most influential and active Spanish women of this time.47

43 During this “edad de Plata,” as José-Carlos Mainer has dubbed the period of intense intellectual and political activity occurring between 1902 and 1939, women were writers and journalists were increasing their public presence and making their voices known. However in studies like Mainer’s, women authors are scarcely present. In fact, there is only one mention of the prolific Carmen de Burgos, and she is serialized with numerous other writers and labeled simply as one “periodista ilustre” who contributed to the La Novela Corta series (74). Mainer does not make note of her novels, nor her extremely important feminist essay, La mujer moderna y sus derechos (1931). Likewise, Margarita Nelken only receives one brief credit: a reference to her 1919 essay La condición social de la mujer en España. Federica Montseny is completely absent from Mainer’s interpretation of this “proceso cultural” that spanned the most formative and prolific years of her life (she was born in 1905). Even more telling, “Feminism” is neither indexed nor mentioned in the text at all. This is astounding, given the extensive feminist activity that began to develop in Spain during these years, and in particular after the First World War. While Mainer’s intent was certainly not to document feminism as an emerging ideological movement, it is significant that this impulse remains unrecognized in a respected text aiming to “asumir críticamente el irrenunciable legado de treinta años de actividad: la ideología política que hubo detrás de una literatura politizada, con sus evasiones, sus errores y sus riesgos” (Mainer 13). 44 Christopher Soufas critiques “the literary generation ‘tradition’” as a whole for creating a “situation in Spanish literature in which the part defines the whole” (48). Soufas argues that this practice excludes those writers who do not fit the “generational pigeonhole,” pointing to the prolific Ramón Gómez de la Serna as a primary example. I would further add that women writers like Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny are especially vulnerable to omission for the very reason Soufas identifies, in addition to the fact that they occupied a subordinate position as women within this male-dominated literary world.


47 In addition to Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny, other women writing in Spain during the early twentieth century include: the essayist and novelist Rosa Chacel, who studied under José Ortega y Gasset; the novelist Concha Espina; María Lejárraga, an essayist and playwright who frequently wrote under her husband’s name, Gregorio Martínez Sierra; many female poets were married to their more well-known male contemporaries of
Despite increased scholarly interest, Roberta Johnson has emphasized the need for an “issues-based approach” to Spanish feminist thinking (“Issues and Arguments” 244). She proposes this methodology as a means to both compare the views of several authors on a particular matter, and to identify those unique concerns of Spanish women, and Spanish society in general, which were instrumental in shaping the development of feminist thought in Spain (the concerns of which, as we have seen, were not necessarily the same as those in other Western European nations) (244). To date, however, there has been no critical, feminist study of female Spanish authors that employs this potentially advantageous methodology.

the Generation of 1927, like María Teresa de León (wife of Rafael Alberti), Concha Méndez (married to Manuel Altolaguirre), and Zenobia de Camprubí (a poet, writer, and translator who married Juan Ramón Jiménez); other active writers include the poets Ernestina de Champourcin and Carmen Conde; the journalist Victoria Kent, and the philosopher and literary critic Maria Zambrano (though Zambrano’s publications appeared rather late in the 1930s). See Mangini’s *Las modernas de Madrid* for more comprehensive information on these and other women.

Currently, several studies exist which focus specifically on Spanish women writers, artists and activists as the country entered modernity. Shirley Mangini’s study, *Las modernas de Madrid* (2001), is crucial for understanding the unique cultural scene of early twentieth century Spain, particularly the increasingly modern, urban center of Madrid. Mangini’s text is not one of literary criticism, however, but rather a collective biography which reflects the motivations, ideologies, successes and failures of women living and working in Madrid during the end of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century (*Las modernas* 9). For Mangini, the feminist consciousness of these women is seen most clearly in the fact that they recognized and strove to improve “la opresiva situación de la mujer a causa de la falta de educación y recursos económicos, y de su posición secundaria en relación con el patriarcado” (92). Roberta Johnson has provided an essential text on both male and female novelists of the early twentieth century, *Gender and Nation in the Spanish Modernist Novel* (2003), in which she focuses on how authors contributed to the transformation of gender roles, family structure, and concepts of nation. For Johnson, “nation, family, women, and marriage informed the canonical Spanish modernist novel as well as noncanonical fiction to a larger extent than has heretofore been acknowledged” (*Gender and Nation* 9). Yet in addition to Johnson’s apt characterization, it is also true that maternity and motherhood (and conversely paternity and fatherhood) surface as regular themes in many of these novels, particularly in those written by women authors – yet this issue is not analyzed in depth in her work. Catherine Davies’s study of Spanish women writers, *Women’s Writing 1849-1996* (1998) explores women’s creative writing during a 150 year period “outside the conventions of the male-dominated literary canon” (1). While Davies aims to foreground a distinctive literary pattern motivated by both the feminine tradition and the developing women’s movement in Spain, her linearly structured chronological study treats each author separately, which isolates recurring themes to a very particular historical era. Thus, the possibility of exploring comparatively the implications of chronic themes arising amongst various female authors and their (male or female) contemporaries is obscured. Davies is correct in pointing out that the female writers in her study “share some important women-centered themes,” which makes it possible to “discover traces of an alternative literary tradition” (4). In this sense, Davies’s work follows the feminist goals of Sandra M. Gilbert’s and Susan Gubar’s methodology in their preeminent work of literary criticism, *The Madwoman in the Attic*. In accordance with these feminist critics, it is clear that a closer examination of issues raised by women writers is crucial for a more adequate understanding of the specificity of feminist ideology in a given cultural context. Kolodny has also advocated a reconsideration of the literary canon, given that canonical texts are selected on the basis of various
Given that motherhood was frequently represented in early twentieth century Spanish novels, while it also occupied a central role in early feminist debates, I suggest that exploring it as an “issue” within women’s literature will advance the development of the feminist project Johnson suggests. Though some Hispanists have begun to focus on issues of motherhood and maternity in the Spanish context, there is no study that explores the purely literary manifestations of these themes comparatively among contemporaries, or that elaborates the potentially profound implications of these issues for Spanish feminism.  

Although their individual feminist positions are markedly distinct, Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny nevertheless exhibit numerous similarities in the way in which they theorize women as individual subjects deserving of certain rights. First, as we have seen, each of these three women develops their feminist discourse from a position that recognized women’s difference from men. This is most perceptible when they address maternity and motherhood, as the ability to bear children was an indisputable biological distinction between the physiology of men and women. When positioning Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny within the feminist movement as it existed in Spain, it is necessary to consider the fact that for Spanish (and European) feminists who valued maternity and the experience of motherhood, the

socially constructed, and temporally dependent, qualifications. Mangini’s, Davies’s, and Johnson’s studies all function as means to this end in the Spanish context.

Specifically, Margot A. Versteeg has studied maternity as represented by Emilia Pardo Bazán in five short stories written at the end of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. Ana Isabel Blanco-García et al have published a volume of essays on maternity as it is represented in various aspects of Spanish culture (history, science, social sciences and cinema to name a few domains), but there is little attention to women’s narrative fiction (Nuevas visiones de la maternidad). Alda Blanco has written about the importance of maternity for María Martínez Sierra, however her focus is limited to her well-know play Canción de cuna (1911) and her extensive production of feminist essays (75). While Martínez Sierra did not participate in the literary world in the same manner as did Carmen de Burgos, Margarita Nelken and Federica Montseny, she nevertheless was an important voice in the feminist discussion in Spain. Finally, María Lozano Estivalis’s recent work, La maternidad en escena (2006) is an extremely useful resource for analyzing the socially constructed nature of cultural representations of maternity, yet this well-researched work is not specific to the Spanish context, failing to include, for example, the work of early 20th century Spanish feminists like Burgos, Nelken, Martínez Sierra, or Montseny.
acceptance of difference implied neither inferiority nor a recognition of limitation. In Nelken’s case, for instance, while it is true that she believed women had a unique “maternal instinct,” and she considered motherhood to be a valuable social role that women could, and even should, take on, she did not advocate it as the only possible social position to which women could aspire. Nelken, much like Burgos and Montseny, advocated deliberate and consciously chosen maternity.

This brings us to the second point of convergence in these women’s consideration of motherhood: all three conceived of this traditional, female role as one that should be voluntarily or consciously chosen, yet not necessarily rejected or refused. For example, Burgos in particular felt strongly that women should neither limit themselves to the traditional role of wife and mother, nor be forced into it due to economic necessity, naivety, lack of education, or even obligation. She aimed to educate women practically on the potential benefits as well as the limitations, challenges, and even suffering which they might face from their decision to embrace the maternal role. In an effort to democratize the maternal role and promote fair and just treatment and access to services for all mothers, Nelken subtly suggests that voluntary single motherhood should in fact be a viable option for Spanish women. That is, single mothers should not be unfairly judged, scorned, or otherwise penalized for their maternity. Yet Nelken does not go as far as Montseny, who controversially defended single women’s right to motherhood in her anarcho-feminist

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50 “Maternal feminists” believed strongly in women’s capacity to contribute to society through their unique maternal instincts and experiences. Some even exalted motherhood not only as the woman citizen’s most important duty, but also her right (Allen 9). In accordance with this celebration of maternal values, LeGates believes that the acceptance and insistence on difference may in fact be read as a key component of first-wave feminism. She explains that, “women were reevaluating male categories rather than simply broadening them to include women, thus they were implicitly committed to a basic transformation of patriarchal structures and vales” (247). See LeGates for more information on “maternal feminism” (244-45) and Allen for an extensive overview of the use of motherhood and maternity within the rhetoric of first-wave European feminism. For a more nuanced discussion of so-called “conservative” feminist activity, see Offen’s discussion of a “relational” mode of feminism among Western European women (“Defining Feminism” 135).
articles. As vocal Spanish women, each of these three writers promoted the practical contemplation of motherhood, a role which they wholeheartedly believed should only be voluntarily chosen. Moreover, these two points of convergence indicate that each of these feminist writers was highly cognizant of the fact that this female role was also a socially and culturally constructed institution.

By understanding motherhood as a complex fusion of personal, female experience and as an institutionalized cultural value, Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny aimed to highlight the contradictions and injustices facing many twentieth-century Spanish women. In particular, by recognizing the interplay between these two facets of the maternal role, these three women share a third point of ideological convergence: a pronounced defense of mothers (regardless of marital status). Each author’s awareness of the socially and/or politically constructed elements of maternity and the female gender role (particularly in the context of the aforementioned ángel del hogar and mujer moderna paradigms), provokes their desires to defend an individual woman’s highly personal choice regarding their maternal potential. Burgos in particular criticized the numerous Spanish legal codes that afforded custodial privileges to men as fathers, whilst relegating the mother to a secondary position before the law (La mujer moderna 215). A fourth instance of common ground between these women is their staunch advocacy of improved women’s education as a prerequisite for feminist progress. I refer to education, in this instance, as more than the standard institutional processes of attending secondary schools or universities. While Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny were themselves highly educated women who passed through various levels of public and private schooling in just such institutions, and they indeed promoted access to this type of education for women, they also understood the importance of an education that would
serve women in the private sphere as well, should they choose to raise children or marry. Additionally, a woman who did take on the traditional role of wife and mother in the home must also possess an adequate level of education in order to participate in politics when women did eventually earn the right to vote. Burgos aimed to educate women practically, largely by portraying alternatives to, or the shortcomings inherent in, the traditional ángel del hogar. Nelken advocated education for the sake of improving women’s economic situations so that marriage did not represent their only access to an economically stable future; and Montseny followed the anarchist trajectory of promoting extensive self-education and self-guided instruction that would lead women to understand their individual situations, their female physiology and reproductive potential, and ultimately their right to personal autonomy.  

Finally, a fifth commonality is evident by examining the mediums through which these women communicated their feminist insights. Burgos, Nelken and Montseny were not only novelists and writers of fiction, but also regular contributors to popular journals and revistas in Madrid and Barcelona at this time. As essayists, they published an array of important non-fiction treatises dealing with the feminist question, in addition to their work as novelist. Glenn and Mazquiarán have identified this tendency to participate in dual genres of fiction and non-fiction as a unifying factor in the majority of Spanish female essayists (2). These scholars argue that it was not the popularity of the essay as a genre, but rather its

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51 In “El problema de los sexos,” Montseny uses the phrase “autodidaxia femenina” (18).
52 Davies observes that feminist writers in Spain followed a curious pattern of writing in which they did not limit their voices to one genre in particular, but participated in fiction, treatises, and journalism (“Feminist Writing” 194).
53 In Spanish Women Writers and the Essay: Gender, Politics and the Self, Glenn and Mazquiarán focus specifically on the “appeal of the essay to novelists and short story writers” given that the majority of Spanish women writers participated in both genres (the essay and the novel, or novelas) (2). Among the writers included in this volume are Carmen de Burgos, Rosa Chacel, María [Gregorio] Martínez Sierra, and Rosa Chacel.
“open-endedness… anti-authoritarian stance…. [and] directness” which made it an especially appealing and functional mode of communication for writers (2). Additionally, female writers of fiction who also cultivated the essay were able to reach out to different audiences. In fact, unlike many canonical Spanish philosophers, Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny did not merely address the intellectual elite, but rather a much more diverse readership. Given the overlap of the essay, the novel, and philosophical feminist thought within the literary production of early twentieth-century Spanish women (which scholars like Bretz, Johnson, and Martínez have noted), Burgos’s, Nelken’s, and Montseny’s socio-historical essays promise to illuminate the diverse feminist premises which inform their narrative fiction.

While the above similarities between Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny are relevant for establishing coherence to the Spanish feminist movement, there are certainly numerous differences between these three women’s positions on women’s roles in both society and the family, which will come to light in the following chapters through a careful analysis of their fiction and essays. The juxtaposition of their essays and fiction (which were addressed to a broad reading public), will more appropriately articulate each woman’s unique feminist ideology than would the exclusive combination of their literature with more contemporary.

54 Glenn and Mazquiarán further suggest that, in their essay, women writers in particular could take advantage of the “degree of intellectual seriousness” that the essay as a genre conferred upon their ideas, whilst expressing their thoughts “as if they enjoyed an intimate communion with readers and were speaking directly to them” (2).

55 Mary Lee Bretz has made note of this points in her study on Margarita Nelken’s essays: “Unlike contemporary male writers such as Graciano Martínez or José Ortega y Gasset, who address a largely homogeneous male, middle-class audience, Nelken speaks to the male worker about issues of gender, to the female middle-class reader about questions dealing with the working class, and to the male middle-class reader about access to power for both women and workers” (116).

56 For example, Carmen de Burgos’s La mujer moderna y sus derechos will supplement my reading of her fiction; Margarita Nelken’s La condición social de la mujer en España and La mujer ante las cortes constituyentes will inform my analysis of her narratives, and Federica Montseny’s essay “El problema de los sexos” will do the same for my readings of her fiction.

57 Perhaps most telling, as we will see, is the fact that all three women had distinct political affiliations, and Montseny in particular was extremely leftist in her anarcho-feminist propositions. In my estimation, Burgos exhibited the most democratic tendencies (though not without socialist influence), Nelken the most socialist, and Montseny the most radical, anarchist philosophies which challenged the very foundations of organized government and national policy.
foreign feminist theorists. In doing so, I follow the recommendations of Roberta Johnson, who points to the wealth of Spanish literature often overlooked by today’s feminist scholars. Johnson questions Hispanists’ tendency to cite contemporary feminist theorists and scholars in the Anglo tradition (Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich, and Gilbert and Gubar, for example) rather than those writing in a specifically Spanish context (whether the author be Carmen de Burgos, Rosa Chacel, or Margarita Nelken). She suggests that scholars must concentrate on the articulation of a more “autochthonous” Spanish feminist theory by learning to rely on Spanish theoretical and sociological studies. Johnson explains her use of the word “autochthonous” in a 2005 article, “Issues and Arguments in Twentieth Century Spanish Feminist Theory”:

Perhaps instead of “applying” feminist theory to Spanish fiction, we should sift thought novels for autochthonous Spanish feminist theory. Fiction, memoirs, letters, and interviews may not appear to engage in the kinds of conceptualization we expect of theory or quasi-philosophical discourse, because we have been conditioned by the practices of feminist thought in other countries to consider only a recognizable essay to be the proper source of feminist thought. (248)

Johnson suggests that “because we are not accustomed to seeking feminist or other theories in sociological essays, novels, newspaper articles, or correspondence, Spanish feminist theory has a body of work with recognizable and recurring themes that has eluded us. And some of the issues addressed… in Spanish works are unfamiliar in the current climate of feminist history” (“Issues and Arguments” 249).

Johnson frames her question as follows: “Is there a caché in referring to Judith Butler or Adrienne Rich rather than to Carmen de Burgos or Rosa Chacel on the constructedness of gender? To Gilbert and Gubar rather than to Carmen de Burgos or Margarita Nelken on the female writing tradition or the social condition of writing women?” (“Spanish Feminist Theory” 14). She suggests that scholars may rely on these sources for both inspiration and authority, and that these foreign models have certainly served a significant purpose in Spanish feminist scholarship, but she encourages today’s scholars to move beyond these models and “learn to rely on Spanish theoretical and sociological studies rather than on those of the French and Anglo-Americans” (14-16).

Some recent scholarly work has begun to engage in this type of “theoretical” appreciation for Spanish women’s writing. For example, Josebe Martínez has highlighted several ways in which Nelken’s *La condición social* shares similar goals and preoccupations with Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1952), notably the
For these reasons, Burgos’s, Nelken’s, and Montseny’s essays promise to expand our understanding of Spanish women authors’ theorization of gender and class relations within a modernizing society. Thus by understanding feminism in Spanish literature as a culturally specific movement through a focus on the particular “issue” of motherhood, this study will provide new considerations for establishing an “autochthonous” theory of feminism for Hispanicists.

**Summation of Chapters**

From this point of departure, Chapter 2 will explore two novels by Carmen de Burgos, *La rampa* (1917) and *Quiero vivir mi vida* (1931), in conjunction with her unique brand of feminism as she outlines and discusses it in her extensive essay *La mujer moderna y sus derechos* (1927). Burgos’s extensive literary output has unfortunately been overlooked, for the most part due to the censoring of her work during the decades of Franco’s dictatorship. In fact, in her extensive biography of this Alemerian author, Concepción Nuñez Rey points out that Burgos was actually included among the first 10 novelists and journalists prohibited by Franco’s regime, joining the likes of Zola, Voltaire, Rousseau, Upton Sinclair and Sinclair Lewis (*Carmen de Burgos* 624-25). As Nuñez Rey eloquently states, the fact that both texts focus on the social construction of woman while providing provocative socio-historical analyses of their situation (*Exiliadas* 56). Regarding Burgos’s *La mujer moderna y sus derechos*, both Michael Ugarte (“Carmen de Burgos”) and Roberta Johnson (“Spanish Feminist Theory”) have recognized the author’s awareness of the socially-constructed, even performative nature of gender roles, which is comparable to some of the most complex observations of contemporary feminist theorists. Johnson’s article even highlights points of convergence between Burgos and Butler, yet emphasized the numerous ways in which Burgos may provide unique insight to Spanish feminist theory and culture (“Spanish Feminist Theory” 16-17). Johnson goes as far as declaring in her article that Hispanists stop using theories of contemporary feminists like Butler, Irigaray, Kristeva, Gilbert and Gubar, and Chodorow, and instead turn their attention to “Spanish feminist theory” as described by Burgos, Chacel, Nelken and their contemporaries (17-18).

**61** Nuñez-Rey explains the effects of censorship as follows: “La labor de enterramiento se cumplió sin dificultad, con gran eficacia, nada más acabar la guerra: entre las primeras medidas tomadas por los vencedores para aplicar a la vida literaria, se elaboraron listas de autores prohibidos, que no debían ser servidos en las bibliotecas, vendidos en las librerías o ser reeditados. De algunos de ellos se prohibieron obras concretas, de
memory of Burgos and the impact she had on Spanish culture remained hidden in depths of library archives, as if a volcano had suddenly buried a flourishing city under its ashes (10). Even José-Carlos Mainer’s crucial study of La edad de plata (1902-1939) makes only one passing reference to Burgos, categorizing her in a serial fashion as simply one “periodista ilustre” among many (male) contemporaries (74). Clearly, Burgos was deemed a threat to the ideology of National Catholicism upon which the Franco regime depended. In recent decades, however, literary scholars have challenged both the androcentric nature of the Spanish literary canon, as well as the insufficiency of traditional “generational” modes of classifying Spanish artists and aesthetic trends. Elisabeth Starcevic penned the earliest full-length study of Burgos’s work, Carmen de Burgos, defensora de la mujer (1976), in which she analyzed Burgos’s fiction and its presentation of “visión variada de la mujer española” (122). Starcevic’s study was one of the first to legitimize Burgos’s literary production as worthy of academic inquiry and deserving of the same esteemed position within the Spanish literary canon as many male novelists of the so-called Generation of 1898. In this same vein of recuperative scholarship, Shirley Mangini’s semi-biographical account has categorized Burgos as a “moderna ‘precoz,’” due to the unusually modern, feminist spirit apparent in

62 Aurora Morcillo describes National Catholicism under the Franco regime: “National Catholicism proclaimed Franco as head of the state (a role assigned to the kind in the early modern period) and (as in the Counter-Reformation era) the backbone of the Catholic Church. In turn, the Catholic Church lent legitimacy to the regime as its heart and soul... The dictatorship created artificial men and women, the latter at the center of the modernization process through the commodification of their bodies in marriage and motherhood” (58-59). Morcillo’s attention to gender in this portrayal of the regime further explains the possible motives for the censoring of a pro-Republican, feminist author like Burgos, whose literature (fiction and non-fiction) often criticized both institutional power and the subordinate position women occupied in Spanish society.

63 See Davies, Spanish Women’s Writing; Johnson, Gender and Nation; Mangini, Las modernas; and Soufas The Subject in Question.
both her personal life and in her fiction (*Las modernas* 59). In relation to Burgos’s fiction, essays by Michael Ugarte, Maryellen Bieder, Judith Kirkpatrick, Roberta Johnson, Shirley Mangini, Helena Establier Pérez, and Michelle Sharp have explored Burgos’s literary world, though none has concentrated explicitly on maternal themes, nor launched their literary analysis from the sole starting point of Burgos’s essays.65

Burgos’s agenda can best be characterized by her desire to educate the Spanish female populace, and to this end she vividly portrays the institutional barriers and social difficulties facing women in Spanish society. Rather than educate by example or by explicit didacticism, Burgos presents her readers with female protagonists caught in the throes of contradictory, generally oppressive social institutions and cultural ideologies. In particular, *La rampa* illustrates the realistic, non-mythologized aspect of motherhood, aiming to inform young women about maternity’s repercussions. The novel’s cautionary tale serves as a means through which Burgos may explore the shortcomings of the traditional roles of wife and mother that had for so long defined the nucleus of feminine identity within Spanish society.

Several years later, in her final novel, *Quiero vivir mi vida*, Burgos portrays a woman who struggles to overcome the challenges resulting from her decision not to become a mother. A

64 Mangini’s book, *Las modernas de Madrid* (2001) is a collective biography of women writers and intellectuals who lived and worked in Madrid from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries. In addition to Burgos, Nelken and (briefly) Montseny, Mangini includes: Emilia Pardo Bazán, Concepción Gimeno de Flaquer, María de Maeztu, [Gregorio] Martínez Sierra, and Victoria Kent, to name a few. The text reflects these women’s motivations, ideology, triumphs and failures during a time of great change and challenge to patriarchal authority (9).

65 In her study of Burgos’s fiction, Helena Establier Pérez’s *Mujer y feminismo en la narrativa de Carmen de Burgos, “Colombine,”* (2000) identifies six “tipos de mujeres” that populate the pages of Colombine’s novels and short stories: las entrometidas, las ingenuas y las vencidas, las malcasadas, las envenenadas, las degeneradas, and las modernas (22). Her study emphasizes the didactic thread – at times quite direct, at others rather subtle – in Burgos’s fiction, specifically owing to those literary creations (often born of real-life examples) that serve to make the reader aware of the precarious situations of many Spanish women at this time (21-22). More recently, Michelle M. Sharp (2010) has elaborated on Burgos’s innovative portrayal of the family and gender roles, positing that the author used “the family in her texts not as a metaphor for the nation or the greater woes of Spain, but rather […] as the cornerstone of the nation” (163). Sharp’s *The Narrative of Carmen de Burgos* interprets Burgos’s literary representations of non-idyllic families as indicative of the urgent need for change in the construction of and importance attributed to the traditional nuclear family in order for Spain to succeed in facing the demands of the modern twentieth century.
core component of this protagonist’s characterization is in fact based on the scientific theory of “intersexuality,” hypothesized by the well-known Spanish endocrinologist Dr. Gregorio Marañón. While Burgos and Marañón did indeed have a strong mutual respect for each other as intellectuals, much of Marañón’s theories regarding women are clearly at odds with Burgos’s feminism. Thus her appropriation of his concept in Quiero vivir mi vida deserves a cautious analysis. Specifically, Burgos’s dismantles Marañón’s theory in a way that reveals the arbitrary nature of the gender roles and traits he assigns the female sex. By destabilizing his scientific hypothesis in this novel, Burgos illustrates the need (for women especially) to critically examine and question those voices of authority (scientific, medical, philosophical, or religious) that often wielded enormous power within Spain’s ideological landscape during the twenties and thirties.

Chapter 3 will consider the literature of Margarita Nelken, particularly her 1923 realist novel, La trampa del arenal, and her 1927 dialogic novel, En torno a nosotras. These works of fiction will be juxtaposed with the author’s contributions to Spanish feminist politics in her essays, La condición social de la mujer en España (1919) and La mujer ante las cortes constituyentes (1931). Few in-depth critical studies exist to date that either explore Nelken’s fiction in depth or position more than one select novel in dialogue with her contemporaries. Sonia Thon, for example, has studied the humor in Nelken’s novelas, and Roberta Johnson discusses Nelken’s La trampa del arenal in her study of the Spanish Modernist novel, making particular note of the way in which this novel “introduces a complex set of class and gender distinctions” (Gender and Nation 248).66 Shirley Mangini is

66 In her article, Thon concludes that Nelken’s fiction expresses an overall “ideología de izquierda” (117). She emphasizes that Nelken’s novelas, and her fictional literary output in general, are neither frivolous nor lacking in artistic value – two common critiques of women’s fiction published in popular venues for a predominantly bourgeois audience (117). In addition to Thon’s work, several shorter studies and critical articles have also been
rare in analyzing En torno a nosotras (Entre nosotras), identifying important ambiguities in the ideological premises behind the text which serve to problematize Spanish women’s appropriation of feminism within the broader women’s movement (“El papel” 174-75). In contrast, though not much addressed by literary scholars, Nelken’s essays have received attention by historians. Geraldine Scanlon examines Nelken’s most popular essay, La condición social de la mujer en España, in her seminal work on Spanish feminism. Mary Lee Bretz and María Aurelia Capmany have written extensively on La condición social. Capmany has pointed to the dual-feminist propositions in this essay: an analysis of Spanish feminism and a defense of future possibilities for Spanish women, and Bretz adds that “the initial focus on the condition of women expands well beyond questions of feminism and women’s rights to include issues of national configuration and identity” (106). Bretz also points to a third major focus of the text: the conflict between gender and class and the complex interactions between these two categories, which sometimes overlap and sometimes compete with each other (106). The emphasis on class dynamics is fundamental to the economic considerations within Nelken’s feminist arguments.

written on Nelken’s fiction. Specifically, Nuria Cruz-Cámara’s insightful reading of Nelken’s La trampa del arenal alongside Federica Montseny’s La indomable, suggests that these two feminist authors do not merely manipulate the ángel del hogar as a literary motif in their texts, but that they actually subvert and do away with “la ideología del ángel del hogar” (23). Aránzazu Borrachero’s article also focuses on La trampa del arenal, presenting this novel as a bildungsroman akin to those philosophical novels of disillusionment which the male members of the Generation of ’98 so adeptly penned. She compares and contrasts the male protagonists and the supporting female characters with those appearing in the novels of Azorín, Baroja and Unamuno, concluding that these male authors simply repeated frequently exploited patterns of women characters (21). While Nelken presents a truly unique “mujer moderna,” Borrachero notes that her true innovation lies in “la redefinición del ‘hombre español’ de la Generación del 98,” and the configuration of this individual’s desire for change, education and self-improvement in a female character – Libertad (26).

67 Mangini’s article refers to the text as Entre nosotras, published in 1927 by Editorial Páez in Madrid. However in her book, Las modernas de Madrid, Mangini uses the title En torno a nosotras (207-08). My copy of the 1927 text, also published in Madrid by Editorial Páez, is plainly titled En torno a nosotras. Furthermore, several studies on Nelken which include a bibliography of her publications similarly use the title En torno a nosotras (see Ena Bordonada’s extensive prologue to La trampa del arenal, for example). I will therefore employ this latter title, En torno a nosotras, throughout this dissertation.
For Nelken, a socialist, economic stability for women is at the heart of the most pressing social problems (including traditional marriage and the possibility of divorce, single motherhood, and even prostitution). This author’s only full-length realist novel, *La trampa del arenal*, illustrates the impact of both economic (in)stability and the acceptance or rejection of motherhood on traditional, conservative women (the ángeles del hogar), on modern, independent women (the mujeres modernas), and even on men within the traditional nuclear family. In accordance with her socialist principles, Nelken directs her feminist arguments towards female and male readers, ultimately revealing the extent to which the women’s movement is relevant to all members of Spanish society. Her second work of fiction, *En torno a nosotras*, is structured as an extended dialogue between two sisters who debate the merits and weaknesses of the feminist movement in Spain, one favoring liberal tenets, the other conservative. This narrative locates motherhood at the crux of the sisters’ discordance, and each sister maintains her own disparate opinion regarding women’s role as wife and mother. The arguments between the sisters reflect the coexistence of liberal and conservative agendas among modern Spanish women, and the impediments to feminist progress posed by residual traditional elements within Spanish culture.

Burgos and Nelken were both supporters of the Second Republic, and they both generally favored socialist-oriented policies and reforms. The socialist movement, of course, was not the only leftist tendency attracting Spanish women who were seeking dramatic social, political, legal, and ideological reform. The militant, leftist movement, Anarchism, was also influential in drawing women adherents and in affecting public discourse on women’s rights and feminism, especially in and around Barcelona. Federica Montseny, whose ideas and work will be the subjects of Chapter 4, was a prominent female figure
within the anarcho-feminist movement. Despite her lack of participation in, and even resistance to, organized feminist activity during the twenties and thirties, we will see that Montseny was nevertheless one of the most vocal female voices advocating social reforms which would ultimately benefit women. The first portion of this chapter will discuss Montseny’s peculiar relationship to feminism. Until recently, critics have approached Federica Montseny’s life and work from a largely historical and political orientation. That is, rather than attend to her extensive literary output or to her role alongside first-wave Spanish feminism, scholars focused predominantly on Montseny’s role within the Spanish anarchist movement and in the subsequent failed defense of Spain from the Fascist forces in the late 1930s. Overall, these historians and literary scholars have foregrounded the paradox of “feminism” in Montseny’s life and thought.  

Shirley F. Fredericks, Martha A. Ackelsberg, Mary Nash, Susanna Tavera, and Carmen Alcalde are among the historians and social scientists who have most extensively written on these facets of Montseny’s life. In Federica Montseny: Palabra en rojo y negro

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68 One of the most accessible pieces of existing literature on Federica Montseny is her autobiography. This text is a fundamental primary source for many of the dates and details surrounding the historical events and personal experiences of Montseny’s early life. *Mis primeros cuarenta años* (1987), as the title makes clear, traces the first forty years of Montseny’s life, up to 1945. The narrative is divided into three sections, each of which reveals in intimate detail the vital milestones that structure the first half of Montseny’s life: “su niñez y pubertad bajo directa influencia pedagógica anarquista, su ingreso adolescente en el mundo del activismo y de la escritura[,] y el exilio en Francia” (Prado 140). In her 1995 study, *Memories of Resistance*, Shirley Mangini discusses both *Mis primeros cuarenta años* and Montseny’s earlier autobiographical tale, *Cien años en la vida de una mujer* (1949), which outlines the hardships Montseny endured upon embarking on her journey into exile with several family members who were unable to care for themselves (her aging mother and her young child, for example) (Mangini, *Memories* 163). Mangini places these autobiographical texts in dialogue with the memoirs and autobiographies written by many of Montseny’s female contemporaries who also experienced lengthy lives of exile after the Spanish Civil War. In Mangini’s estimation, Montseny exhibits a “bitter recollection about the past” (34). As such, she “urgently outlines the need for a new perspective on the Spanish civil war and provides a justification for writing the silenced stories of women’s lives as they were affected by the politics of war and repression” (91). For Mangini, the resulting autobiographical narrative “invariably contradicts her antifeminist rationale” as Montseny appears “conscious of the fact that Spanish women have been denied a place in politics and in history” (46). In an attempt to assuage these contradictions, Patricia V. Greene (1997) has written an excellent article in which she places Montseny’s thought within what she refers to as an “anarcho-feminist genealogy,” thus recuperating this Spanish woman’s silenced voice and inserting it within a broader historical narrative (“Federica Montseny”).
(1983), Alcalde makes available the transcriptions of her personal interviews with Montseny, her own independent research on the author, and many of Montseny’s later essays published in exile in Toulouse, France, during the sixties and seventies. Yet Alcalde laments the fact that, for the most part, scholars have favored the portrayal of Montseny as a political persona, thus neglecting her literary output. Even the most recent scholarly biographies on Montseny have concentrated more on her politics than on her literature, including Irene Lozano’s *Federica Montseny. Una anarquista en el poder* (2004) and Susanna Tavera’s *Federica Montseny. La indomable* (2005).

The censoring of dissident Spanish authors throughout the decades of the Franco dictatorship, as well as Montseny’s own exile in France after the fall of the Republic, were major factors contributing to the lack of critical attention given to both her fictional literature and non-fictional essays. Yet in recent decades, Hispanists have begun to pay closer attention to Montseny as a literary figure. In 1991 her most discussed novel, *La indomable*, was reprinted, and María Alicia Langa Laorga provided a new generation of readers with a careful analysis of the text and of Montseny’s polemic relationship with both Spanish feminism and anarchism. Most recently, Antonio Prado has examined many of the short

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69 Alcalde states: “Intentar reducir a Federica Montseny sólo a la activista, a la líder sindical, a la anarquista fanática y a la ‘faísta’ violenta, es un craso error que la historia está cometiendo… En ninguna entrevista, en escasísimos escritos sobre sí misma, publicados desde 1930 a 1983, se ha detenido nunca a analizar y a reflexionar sobre su propia obra literaria” (25). Núñez Ronchi, in her 2000 article on Montseny’s *La indomable*, makes a similar observation: “A diferencia de la figura política, la obra de Montseny, por lo pronto, no ha recibido la atención de la crítica literaria” (200).

70 Tavera does include brief discussions of Montseny’s novels and novelas in her chapter on the author’s “feminist” politics, however the aim of the biography remains predominantly historical.

71 Montseny was forced into exile in France in 1938, and she would remain in Toulouse, only returning to Spain briefly towards the end of her life. Montseny herself has recognized the fact that her own work, as well as the writings of other influential female anarchists (like Teresa Claramunt, Lucía Sánchez Saornil, and her own mother Soledad Gustavo), are extremely difficult to access. In an interview, she laments: “Desgraciadamente hoy resulta difícil leerlas porque no están al alcance del público” (qtd. in Núñez Esteban and Samblancat Miranda 185).

72 Recent scholarship on Montseny’s fiction and non-fiction includes the following: Roberta Johnson has included Montseny’s three long novels, *La Victoria* (1925), *El hijo de Clara* (1927), and *La indomable* (1928),
Montseny wrote for *La Revista Blanca*. In *Matrimonio, familia y estado. Escritoras anarco-feministas en la Revista Blanca (1898-1936)* (2011), Prado posits that many of the articles presented in *La Revista Blanca*, and especially those written by “anarcho-feministas” like Montseny, proposed new ideological formulations with respect to contemporary paradigms of gender, class and the nation state (11). I aim to extend Prado’s exploration in order to position Montseny’s anarcho-feminist understanding of motherhood within the broader context of first-wave feminist activity in Spain.

The analyses of Montseny’s texts (much like those of Burgos’s and Nelken’s) will rely heavily on the “maternal dilemma,” or the recognition that motherhood could be voluntary and even temporary, rather than an obligation or a lifetime identity. For Montseny, and for most anarchists, motherhood should in fact be a voluntary choice; Montseny even uses the phrase “maternidad consciente” in *El problema de los sexos*, a term which Burgos and Nelken similarly embraced. Nevertheless, Montseny attributes such importance to maternity and motherhood that apparent maternal celebration often undermines alongside the literature produced by her more well-known female contemporaries, Carmen de Burgos, Margarita Nelken, Rosa Chacel, and Concha Espina, in her innovative analysis of Spanish modernism through the lens of gender, *Gender and Nation in the Spanish Modernist Novel* (2003); Ana Nuñez-Ronchi (2000) and Nuria Cruz-Cámara (2004) are among the literary critics who have published recent articles on *La indomable*; Ana Lozano de la Pola (2006) has undertaken a close reading of Montseny’s controversial 1925 novel, *La Victoria*; María Luz Arroyo Vázquez (2007) has concentrated her efforts not on Montseny’s fictional literature, but rather on her essays in order to contextualize her specific anarchist politics within a global framework.

Prado’s study presents the work of the three most influential female writers in the Spanish anarchist movement (according to his own estimation), whom he labels “anarco-feministas”: Federica Montseny, her mother Soledad Gustavo, and Antonia Maymó.

Allen observes this phenomenon in various forms throughout Western European first-wave feminist movements.

Montseny also refers to the Brazilian individualist anarchist and anarcho-feminist, María Lacerda de Moura, in her endorsement of “maternidad consciente” in *El problema de los sexos* (28). Lacerda published *A mulher é uma degenerada?* (*The Woman is a Degenerate?*) in 1924, and the problems of family organization and love became increasingly central to her thought by the late 1920s (Besse 179). Lacerda supported “sexual liberation and ‘conscientious maternity’” (182). Her anarcho-feminist position was informed by the writings of Russian feminist Alexandra Kolontai and the Swedish feminist and suffragist Ellen Key, and she rejected marriage, instead urging women “to become economically independent in order to seek love and sexual fulfillment outside the boundaries of social conventions and legal bonds” (179-80). See Besse’s *Restructuring Patriarchy: The Modernization of Gender Inequality in Brazil, 1914-1940* for more information on Lacerda and Brazilian anarcho-feminists.
her otherwise idyllic, even utopic vision of a future social order. As a result, some scholars have suggested she did not, in reality, desire to substantially change the situation of women in Spanish society (Mangini, *Memories* 49). Yet Mary Nash rightly points out that maternity, as a significant constant in Montseny’s thought, is preeminently conceptualized from a *philosophical* standpoint, rather than from a practical position based primarily on social, economic, or legal concerns (“Dos intellectuals” 98). This philosophical approach to mothering distinguishes Montseny from her more practical, socialist-inclined counterparts, Burgos and Nelken. Unlike Burgos and Nelken, therefore, Montseny even appears to share many of the beliefs promoted by first-wave “maternal feminists.”

In her novel *La indomable* (1928), as well as in her short stories “Maternidad” and “El derecho al hijo” (both published in the 1920s), Montseny depicts mothers as powerful individuals and motherhood as an essential institution in dire need of respect and reform. Her essay, “El problema de los sexos” (1931) deliberately elaborates the issues at stake in rethinking and incorporating motherhood within feminist demands for equality. Through close readings of each of these works, we will see how Montseny construes motherhood and mothering as a female art form, an individual right, and ultimately a powerful vital force which ensures the future of both the nation, and humanity.

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76 LeGates explains that maternal feminists argued that “women, because of their maternal instincts or experiences, had a unique and vital contribution to make to society. They argued from the differences rather than the similarity between the sexes…” (244-45). However maternal feminists also aimed to “extend the virtues of the family to society,” and they believed that “gender differences were rooted in women’s family situation” (245). While Montseny may have agreed with the latter portion of this statement, the former clearly privileges traditional family values, which Montseny aimed to radically alter. Allen describes this “maternalist ideology” in a less restrictive way, noting that “feminists who extolled motherhood as woman’s distinctive contribution to society… had no intention of confining mothers to their conventional roles of depending wife, domestic drudge, and sexual slave. Indeed… they aspired to be both mothers and human beings… Maternalist ideology and practices involved no return to traditional roles, but rather utopian visions of a world where motherhood would enhance rather than limit women’s freedom” (13). In my estimation, Allen’s definition fits best with Montseny’s brand of maternal “feminism.”
Finally, the conclusion will examine the implications of feminist representations and redefinitions of motherhood in the Spanish context. As such, this dissertation aims to establish an “issues-based” approach to the question of Spanish feminism in the early decades of the twentieth century. By concentrating on the way in which significant women authors of this time period represented motherhood and maternity in their narratives and non-fiction, against the backdrop of the complex nature of the “maternal dilemma” and the enduring ideology of the ángel del hogar, I will challenge those critics who denounce Spanish feminism, including the literature of many first-wave Spanish feminists, as essentialist, conservative, or even failures. Rather, the challenge of addressing maternity and motherhood amidst the changes occurring in early twentieth-century Spain sparked Spanish authors to theorize a difference-based Spanish feminism that was an essential component of the legal, social, and ideological changes that many fought to achieve. Examining literary representations of motherhood and maternity within the work of socially-minded, female authors like Carmen de Burgos, Margarita Nelken, and Federica Montseny, alongside their advocacy for social, legal and political reforms to improve the situation of women, will illuminate the conflicted domain of gender ideology in Spanish literature and in the modern Spanish nation.
Chapter 2: Urban Motherhood and Institutional Power in the Literature of Carmen de Burgos

En la teoría se enaltece así la función maternal para animar a la mujer, engañando su vanidad, y que no rehúya la perpetuidad de la especie, en la que tanto dolor hay para ella, se la encadena en la práctica, a lo que pudiera llamarse maternidad obligatoria. Se invoca la maternidad como uno de los motivos que deben retenerla en el hogar apartada de toda otra actividad, como si el papel exclusivo de la mujer fuese el de madre y esposa.

--Carmen de Burgos, *La mujer moderna y sus derechos* (1927), p. 219

This chapter will focus on two of Burgos’s longer novels: *La rampa*, written towards the end of the First World War in 1917, and her final novel, *Quiero vivir mi vida*, written in 1931 just before the onset of the Second Republic and the end of Burgos illustrious career. In *La rampa*, Burgos presents the failure of both traditional, conservative values (represented by the ángel del hogar) and modern charitable institutions (specifically, Madrid’s maternity ward) which neglected to adequately educate and support mothers. The novel portrays the urgent need for improved, more practical female education, as well as for socially just institutional reform. The didactic nature of this text is essential for providing not a model for women to follow, but rather a cautionary tale of the realities which many women may be forced to navigate should they find themselves in the predicament of the rather naïve, pregnant protagonist. *Quiero vivir mi vida* was written nearly fifteen years after *La rampa*, and only one year prior to the dramatic social reforms which the Second Republic would bring about, however we can still appreciate the core themes of female identity and gender (especially as the latter relates to and informs social behavior and legal policies). In this
novel, Burgos presents a protagonist who consciously decides not to become a mother. While this decision would appear to prevent the suffering endured by the La rampa’s protagonist, Burgos reveals the way in which women who have no desire to fulfill this maternal role and consciously decide not to take on motherhood might be left with the unnerving sensation that there is no role for them in the present Spanish society. The intense psychological toll which the decision to refuse motherhood may take on a Spanish woman is dramatized through the manipulation of the popular, albeit controversial, scientific theories of Dr. Gregorio Marañón. Read in light of Burgos’s extensive 1927 feminist essay, La mujer moderna y sus derechos, these two novels will demonstrate her forceful advocacy for change and reform in the realms of materiality (urban society) and ideology (bourgeois expectations and religious tradition) in order to improve the situation of women in relation to their potential role as mothers.

The Feminism of Carmen de Burgos, “Colombine” (1867-1932)

Publically known at various moments throughout her prolific literary and professional career as “Colombine,” “La Divorciadora,” and “La Dama Roja,” Carmen de Burgos (1867-1932) earned and array of diverse appellatives which reflect not only her modern sensibility, but also the provocative and often controversial nature of her intellectual activity and socio-political advocacy. The complexity of her modern, feminist thought owes largely to the

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77 “Colombine” was the pseudonym given to her by the director of the new newspaper Diario Universal, in which she published her first regular column “Lecturas para la mujer” in 1903 (S. Kirkpatrick, Mujer, modernismo 172). She would continue using this name throughout her career, not to hide her true identity, but because the playful namesake appealed to her lower-middle and working class readers. “Colombine” alludes to and intelligent, cheeky maid who was a popular character in the French and Italian theater; however the name was also a sign of femininity, female cunning and frivolity, as well as a symbol of cosmopolitan modernism (172-73). Kirkpatrick suggests that Burgos’s willingness to adopt this particular epithet indicates that she did indeed emphasize “la latente identidad de clase del personaje convencional, una servienta descarada, desarrollando un estrecho vínculo entre su propio personaje público y el espíritu liberal y democrático que
multiple roles she assumed throughout her life; she was a teacher, journalist, writer, lecturer, reformer, activist, mujer moderna, feminist, socialist, republican, pacifist, wife, and mother. This latter maternal role will direct the common thread of this chapter: Burgos’s vision of motherhood and maternity. Beginning in 1895, Burgos worked as a teacher at various schools in Almería, Guadalajara and Madrid. Upon establishing permanent residency in Madrid, she became a journalist for one of the city’s most popular newspapers, El Heraldo de Madrid, even becoming the first female war correspondent in 1909 when the periodical sent her on assignment to cover the war in Morocco “from a feminine perspective” (Pozzi 188). As a writer and artist, she frequented several of the most exclusive, male-dominated intellectual and avant-garde circles of her time, even establishing her own, very popular, tertulia in Madrid: Los miércoles de Colombine. Despite the fact that she was twenty years his senior, she maintained a nearly twenty-year relationship with Ramón Gómez de la Serna, “the founding father of the Spanish avant-garde” (Soria Olmedo 15). Many critics rightly point out the great influence she exerted on him in his renowned literary and artistic career.79
As a lecturer, activist and feminist, she championed reform of some of the most unjust, oppressive, and outdated elements of the Código Civil, even using her fiction to draw public attention to the arbitrary, gendered-nature of legal discourse. In politics she defended the Republic until her death, mythically collapsing at a round-table discussion in the Círculo Radical Socialista with what would be her final words: “¡Viva la República!” (Ballarín Domingo 33). Furthermore, Burgos was perhaps one of the most cosmopolitan women of her time, boasting an impressive resume of international travel. Over the years, she journeyed throughout Europe and the Americas more than any other writer of her time – male or female – having visited Argentina, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Brazil, Cuba, Bolivia, Panama, Portugal, Morocco, England, France, Switzerland, Italy, Norway, Denmark and Germany (Mangini, Las modernas 62).

Yet even before her international travels and illustrious public writing career, several quite dramatic events in Burgos’s personal life left a mark on how she approached the world, and undoubtedly influenced her continuously evolving, increasingly outspoken feminist position. Born in 1867 in the small pueblo of Rodalquilar, part of the rural region near Almería, Burgos married a man fifteen years her senior when she was a mere sixteen years of age. The marriage was not a happy one, and her husband was “un hombre juerguista y vago” out that it was Burgos, through her renowned tertulias, who introduced Ramón to “el mundo de los intelectuales y directores de editoriales más conocidos de la época” (x). Johnson has suggested that by 1927, with the publication of his novel La mujer de ámbar, Ramón “had doubtless fallen under the influence of his feminist partner” (Gender and Nation 243). Furthermore, I believe Burgos was a literary inspiration to Ramón on some occasions, and the clearest evidence of the confluence of their ideas is observable in their short stories critiquing conventional marriage arrangements: Burgos’s Ellos (1917) and Ramón’s Ella + Ella – Él + Él (1937). See Anja Louis for an extensive analysis of Carmen de Burgos’s role in reforming the most misogynous codes of the Código Civil, specifically how her critique of legal codes intertwines with the plots of her fiction. Louis suggests that Burgos employs melodrama as a way of critiquing legal discourse: “One of the central functions of melodrama is to give an uncomplicated moral reading of the universe: it ought to assure us that ultimately there is a victory of good over evil; it ought to affirm that love and fair treatment are the proper human values that eventually succeed. However, exactly the opposite happens in the work of Carmen de Burgos: law at the time was so overtly gendered that her melodrama depicts the victory of evil over good and shows that an ethic of care is futile when faced with an overpowering legal system” (162).
(Ballarín Domingo 17), who was abusive and unfaithful to his wife (Mangini, *Las modernas* 60). Burgos began to supplement the family’s income by working for her father-in-law’s newspaper, which exposed her to the intricacies of the world of journalism and publishing for the first time. By her early twenties, she had given birth to four children, yet only one daughter survived infancy. Louis suggests that the death of her eight-month old son in 1894 marked a turning point in her rural Almerían lifestyle (4). As a result of Krausist educational reforms in the late nineteenth century, Burgos decided to enroll in university courses in Granada, and she obtained teaching credentials in 1895. Soon she was able to earn her own income as a teacher near her Almerian village and finally leave her unfaithful, abusive husband upon taking a teaching job in Guadalajara. However, the decision to leave her husband was not without controversy, especially in a conservative, rural Spanish town with intensely Catholic values. Ballarín Domingo suggests that rampant gossip, “rumores y calumnias,” may have actually accelerated Burgos’s departure (18).

In August of 1901, she relocated to urban Madrid in order to establish contact with the intellectual world and better develop her professional relationship with some of Madrid’s

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81 Mangini suggests that Burgos’s personal life reads like a “una novela feminista moderna de profundos ribetes románticos” (*Las modernas* 59). Not only did she leave an abusive husband and move to the city where she lived and worked as a single mother, but she maintained a nearly lifelong amorous relationship with the well-known avant-garde writer Ramón Gómez de la Serna. This relationship climactically ended in 1929, after more than twenty years, when Burgos discovered that her companion had had an affair with her own daughter, Maruja (Ballarín Domingo 31; Mangini, *Las modernas* 63-64). Ramón and Colombine, however, did manage to reestablish a friendly relationship which would last until the latter’s death in 1932.

82 Scanlon credits the Krausists with the majority of the educational reforms which improved both the quality of women’s education, and their access to it, particularly through the creation of organizations like the Escuela de Institutrices and the Asociación para la Enseñanza de la Mujer (30-41). According to Scanlon, the Asociación para la Enseñanza de la Mujer offered young women access to the best education possible in late nineteenth century Spain and was “un instrumento para elevar el nivel de educación de las mujeres no solo através [sic] de sus propias escuelas sino también a través de la influencia más amplia que ejercía tanto en el sector público como en el privado” (40-41). For more information on women’s education in Spain during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Mangini (*Las modernas* 34-73); Capel Martínez (“La apertura” 128-45); and Scanlon (15-57).

83 Mangini also makes note of this scandal: “En aquellos tiempos el escándalo no podía ser mayor: [Burgos] era una mujer casada con una hija que había abandonado al marido para marcharse a la capital. Madrid representaba para Carmen el anonimato, la libertad y grandes esperanzas para una mujer que aspiraba a triunfar como escritora” (*Las modernas* 60).
top journals and periodicals, such as *Diario Universal*, *ABC*, and *Heraldo de Madrid*. She arrived in the city with her young daughter, but with no certain prospects for steady employment. With the help of family contacts, she soon obtained work as a teacher, first with the Escuela de Artes e Industrias de Madrid (Mangini, *Las modernas* 60), and later with the Colegio Nacional de Sordomundos y Ciegos de Madrid (Ballarín Domingo 18). During these early years of the twentieth century, cities like Madrid were expanding and transforming into modern, commercial societies. This afforded women like Burgos both the opportunity for employment in the public sphere, as well as a liberating sense of anonymity which was impossible in many small rural towns. The anonymity and independence which city life provided were crucial to the development of feminist women’s evolving thoughts and projects.84 Thus even before her international travels, Burgos voluntarily chose to make a drastic change in her life by relocating from a rural Spanish *pueblo* to the urban center of Madrid. Given the challenges of her unpleasant experiences as a young wife and mother, coupled with her intellectual pursuits and employment in a modern urban environment, we can appreciate how Burgos’s dedication to improving women’s schooling largely originated in her recognition of the immense benefits and opportunities that her own education had afforded her. As such, throughout her life, Burgos fought passionately for the edification of women in *all* aspects of society. She fought hard to promote an education that would not only prepare women to enter the workforce, gain economic independence or earn suffrage, but also enlighten them on the realities of marriage, sexual relationships, pregnancy and especially motherhood. That is, her liberal vision of education included *both* a call for women’s increased access to public schooling and the university, as well as a dismantling of

84 See Davies (*Spanish Women’s Writing* 18-19), Mangini (*Las modernas* 60), and Ballarín Domingo (18).
the rhetoric surrounding the *perfecta casada* (or the *ángel del hogar*, evoked by conservatives) that revealed how this role failed modern women.  

Though rather liberal in her feminist activism, especially towards the end of her career, Carmen de Burgos nevertheless shared many concerns with so-called maternal feminists who, as we have observed, present day scholars often perceive as having been too conservative. We must recall, however, that in the era of first-wave feminism, maternal feminists believed strongly in “gender difference rooted in women’s unique family situation,” and they maintained that women had unique contributions to make to society as a result of their maternal instincts and experiences (244-245).  

Classifying “maternalism” in a similar way, Allen describes maternal feminists as those who exalted motherhood “as the woman citizen’s most important right and duty” (9). During the early years of her career, many of Burgos’s essays and lectures reflected a more conservative vision of women’s social role as wife and mother – especially in the first decade of the twentieth century. For example, we can clearly observe this moderate, even traditional, position in Burgos’s 1900 essay, “La educación de la mujer” (*Ensayos*). Here, she advocates improved education for young...

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85 Mangini points out that the central argument between liberals and conservatives surrounding women’s education at the end of the nineteenth century revolved around the family. While liberals defended women’s education, conservatives feared that the family would be endangered if women were to dedicate years to study and professional careers: “Se seguía invocando a ‘la perfecta casada’, a la tarea reproductiva de la mujer, y al tamaño inferior del cráneo femenino y su subsecuente deficiente capacidad intelectual. Enfrentado con el conservadurismo y puritanismo católico, el camino hacia la profesionalización de la mujer iba a ser largo y tortuoso” (*Las modernas* 37). In *La mujer moderna*, Burgos admits that the care of the home (*hogar*) is a duty of which women can be proud (“la gran hazaña cultural de la mujer es haber creado la casa”), she demonstrates an awareness of how this cultural role has changed in modern times: “Pero no sería justo, en recompensa [por el mantenimiento del hogar], forjar de la casa una cárcel y que resultase la mujer como el gusano de seda labrándose la propia tumba, formándose para ella, la creadora, prisión en vez de deleite” (128).

86 Marlene LeGates identifies two main strands in first-wave feminism (reminding readers that there was “no single ideology”): Maternal feminists and Liberal feminists. According to LeGates, maternal feminists “argued from the differences rather than the similarity between the sexes, and urged that the values of female culture be used to counter the competitive, destructive aspects of a male-dominated industrial order. Liberal feminists, on the other hand, remained inspired by the liberal ideology of equal rights, based on the assumption of the essential similarity of all human beings” (244-45). She adds: “While liberal feminists wanted to extend liberal ideas to the family, maternal feminists wanted to extend the virtues of the family to society” (245).
women, laments the fact that Spanish women are not encouraged to seek out professional careers or participate in the arts, and decries the fact that marriage is portrayed as their most appropriate “career” (63). However, at various points throughout this essay she qualifies her own advocacy by emphasizing what should not be forgotten amidst such reforms: “[E]s preciso no olvidar que hay que educar madres y esposas” (65). She also emphasizes the need for a religious education – a conservative position that may even be labeled an oddity given that she maintained significant distance from organized religion, and advocated secular education for decades (Mangini Las modernas 71). At this same time (between 1900 and 1904), Burgos translated, and penned the introduction to the German neurologist and (in)famous misogynist Paul J. Moebius’s controversial text, La inferioridad mental de la mujer (published in Germany in 1900). This pseudo-scientific study provoked strong public reaction both in Germany and in the intellectual community abroad due to its blatant misogyny and selective, subjective interpretations of scientific “evidence.” Clearly antifeminist in orientation, Moebius relies on essentialist contentions regarding women in

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87 Ballarín-Domingo classifies Burgos as a “panteísta” (18). In this earlier essay, however, Burgos makes the following statements, each of which are drastically opposed to the liberal ideology she would promote throughout the early decades of the twentieth century (and notable at the beginning of the 1910s): “Se debe hacer de la mujer un elemento de progreso y engrandecimiento social, religioso y moral; y esto solo puede conseguirse por medio de una buena y sólida educación, que debe descansar en principios religiosos” (64); “Todo el trabajo de perfección de las facultades que necesita hacer la educación, ha de descansar sobre una base sólida y verdadera, que es la religión” (68). This conservative rhetoric is so dramatically different from Burgos’s later political and social agendas that it prompts the scholar who is well-versed in Colombine’s literature to speculate what may have been the motives behind such statements at this early point in her career: Was she required by the publisher to promote the value of a conservative, religious education? Did she simply take on any project presented to her, simply as a means of securing income?

88 Countless historians and literary critics have identified Moebius’s unequivocal misogyny (Mangini, Las modernas; Scanlon; Schwartz, to name a few). Regarding Moebius’s text, the original German title is Über den physiologischen Schwachsinn des Weibes. Burgos’s Spanish translation of the title is La inferioridad mental de la mujer, but she also includes the subtitle, La deficiencia mental fisiológica de la mujer. Contemporary English translations also show variance in the title, with On the Physiological Idiocy of Women appearing to be the more common, and About the Intellectual Deficiency of Women the more literal. Agatha Schwartz indicates a third English translation of this text in a much later edition published in 1907: On Woman’s Physiological Insanity (350). Schwartz suggests that Moebius’s essentialist claims exhibit a clear attempt to gain control over the emerging feminist discourse, and she resumes his selective readings of both scientific studies and history as a way of supporting his antifeminist agenda (349-51).
order to prove their “naturally” lower status and inferior sensibilities. Nevertheless, Burgos embarked on the task of translating this text to Spanish, writing her own introduction, and supplementing the text with her own articles and footnotes. She makes clear at various instances that she disagrees with the premise of the “study,” even making special effort to point to the failures and oversights in the German scholar’s logic. Yet in her introduction, Burgos openly expresses her skepticism towards the goals of the feminist movement: “El feminismo tiene para mí un aspecto social sospechoso; cubierto con el espléndido manto del progreso” (vi). As a final example of Burgos’s early conservative vision, one can look to her numerous conduct manuals for women which include such titles as *La mujer en el hogar* (1909), *Las artes de la mujer* (1911), and *El arte de seducir* (1917).  

These conservative positions are certainly a far cry from the liberal feminist stance that Burgos would maintain throughout the twenties, and then elaborate explicitly in *La mujer moderna y sus derechos* in 1927. The turning point in this conservative-to-liberal shift in Colombine’s ideology, I believe, is especially perceptible in the years preceding the First World War. Specifically, in 1909 she became the first female war-correspondent for the war in Morocco, witnessing firsthand the disastrous effects of war. She traveled extensively throughout Europe during World War I where she observed the “efecto emancipador” that the war effort was having for women, as they began to enter the workforce and take part in social and political activities outside the home while men were away fighting in the war (Ballarín Domingo 28). In the years following this assignment, Burgos maintained an assiduous international travel agenda. Such extensive trips abroad indeed distinguished

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89 Mangini explains that the publication of these manuals for women (and several articles in *El Heraldo* in which she was obligated to write of “cosas de mujeres”) caused many of Burgos’s contemporaries not to take her seriously (*Las modernas* 68). But Mangini suggests that it was merely Burgos’s “espíritu pragmático” which led her to understand what types of books would sell easily, thus ensuring she could maintain a steady income while devoting much more time to her literature aimed at denouncing women’s repression (68-69).
modern women from their more traditional counterparts, especially with regards to their understanding of the feminist movement: “El hecho es que el viajar siempre cambia radicalmente la perspectiva ante nuestro microcosmos” (Mangini, Las modernas 78). Travel certainly exposed the individual to new experiences and thoughts, allowing for invaluable cultural comparison, and any modern Avant-garde writer, poet, painter or journalist was well-aware of the need to broaden one’s horizons through international experience in order to establish public credibility.\(^90\) For Burgos, as well as for her female contemporaries, Spain was in fact a unique microcosm, isolated to a great extent, both geographically and culturally, from the radical changes that were occurring in other countries.\(^91\) The opportunity for women to view their own country critically, from a distance, was fundamental for recognizing the particularities of Spanish women’s current social roles and potential possibilities.

It was during this whirlwind second decade of the century, when the spirit of the avant-garde was stirring in Madrid, that Burgos’s relationship with Ramón Gómez de la Serna became more intimate. The pair traveled together, attended tertulias and conferences, and even worked side-by-side on their respective literary projects. It was also during this time that Burgos began writing what would become her most well-known, socially-minded feminist novel, La rampa (1917). The 1910s, then, stand in stark contrast to the first ten years

\(^{90}\) Derek Harris explains that, while much of the avant-garde activity in Spain was “an occupation conducted in clothes borrowed from abroad,” especially from Paris, Spanish writers and artists also aimed to establish “an individual identity apart from the dominating pressures from Paris” (1). Their international experience allowed them to observe, analyze, appropriate and eventually adapt foreign ideas to the Spanish milieu, “squaring … the horizons borrowed” (2). Similarly, feminists who traveled abroad, like Burgos, Margarita Nelken, and Federica Montseny were able to observe, analyze, appropriate and adapt those foreign reforms and initiatives which would fit their own perception of Spanish feminism.

\(^{91}\) Geographically, the Iberian peninsula was separated from the rest of Europe by the Pyrenees mountains, occupying what Susan Kirkpatrick calls an “ambigua posición [...] en la periferia de Europa” (Mujer, modernism 17); culturally, Spain was predominantly Catholic, not protestant like England, Germany, or the United States (Scanlon 5); and politically the Spanish nation remained neutral during one of the most tumultuous times in the early decades of the twentieth century – World War I (1914-17). These factors greatly contributed to the maintenance of a more traditional, conservative culture in Spanish society, particularly with regards to feminism and the women’s movement.
of the century, during which time Colombine struggled to support herself and her child as a single mother, and attempted to gain recognition in the literary world by publishing conservative essays, commissioned articles, conduct manuals, short novellas, and even cookbooks. Burgos herself makes reference to the great changes which she had witnessed in this decade, and her words not only capture the changing cultural milieu, but also, I believe, her own evolving feminist consciousness:

Si los comienzos del cristianismo marcan una nueva Era, y la Revolución francesa es el principio de una Edad, no puede dudarse que la Gran Guerra, que estalló en 1914, da comienzo a un nuevo período histórico y remueve hondamente principios y costumbres. (La mujer moderna 59)

Burgos took an increasingly liberal feminist stance during the second decade of the twentieth century, a fact that is made clear by examining her literary production and increased activism during World War I and the post-war years. Establier Pérez agrees with my assessment, though she places a slightly earlier date on this shift; she believes that the majority of Burgos’s writings after 1911 illustrate a revised, modernized conception of feminism as a worthy and noble cause (24). The present chapter will center on Carmen de Burgos’s more liberal position regarding women as mothers, specifically in the literature she produced after 1917. As her nuanced stance on maternal issues developed more fully, her relationship to feminism as a movement also evolved.

Despite what would eventually be a rather liberal stance, many issues important to more conservative, maternal feminists clearly affected the trajectory and evolution of Burgos’s feminist thought. In particular, Burgos found women’s biological difference, specifically in pregnancy and motherhood, to be a crucial factor in determining a woman’s
social position in an increasingly modern society. Davies has suggested that Burgos’s feminist position was one in which she “championed mothers, especially single mothers, while attacking feminism, which rejected motherhood” (122). While Davies is certainly correct in pointing to motherhood as a core belief of Burgos’s feminism, however, the notion that she explicitly “attacked feminism” is problematic, especially given that many brands of Western European feminism did not reject motherhood outright.92 In fact, many feminist organizations in France and Italy, for example, fought for improved social services and rights within the workplace, precisely on behalf of women as mothers by “[a]rguing for the centrality of the maternal role in society” (Cova 180).93 For her part, though we have seen some instances of convergence, Burgos did not entirely agree with maternal feminists, or the core ideology promoted by Catholic women’s groups like the Asociación Católica de la Mujer, or even the Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Españolas (La ANME). We must recall that these groups often lauded motherhood and celebrated maternity, yet their agenda left unchallenged the social order implied by the ángel del hogar paradigm. For example, they denied divorce, refused advocating for birth control, and favored maintaining the label “illegitimate” to classify children born out of wedlock.94 Burgos’s more liberal feminist ideology, on the other hand, supported these reforms, each of which represented a clear break from the traditional values embodied by the ángel del hogar, in her idyllic domestic world. In

92 See Allen’s Feminism and Motherhood, the anthology of essays by Bock and Thane, and Karen Offen’s articles.
93 Anne Cova explains that French feminist views on maternity at the turn of the century were complex, but each exhibited a marked “preoccupation with improving the situation of mothers, with public recognition of female and motherly values and work, with a new relation between rights, responsibilities and protection, between public and private and between maternity and the state” (124). Buttafuco relates the Italian case, in which “[a]rguing for the centrality of the maternal role in society meant foregrounding the responsibility of the state towards mothers and children as integral, essential elements of the nation itself” (180).
94 We must recall that the conservative roots of the firmly Catholic ANME were evident by examining the issues absent from their agenda: divorce, birth control, and a refusal to eliminate the concept of “illegitimate” children born out of wedlock (Scanlon 207). Each of these three items was fundamental to Burgos’s feminist position.
fact, Burgos’s liberal ideology included support for what historian Marlene LeGates would categorize as “voluntary motherhood” (214-16). LeGates explains that feminists who supported voluntary motherhood did not dispute the potential desirability of the mother role, but rather they affirmed the “right of women to decide if and when to bear children” (241). Thus it is inexact to suggest that Burgos “attacked” feminism for its rejection of motherhood. While Burgos may have found the diversity of the movement problematic, she nonetheless clearly identifies herself as a feminist by the time she publishes *La mujer moderna y sus derechos* in 1927, and her particular feminist stance acknowledged gender difference. Importantly, Burgos explicitly states that such distinctions should have no bearing on access to education, legislation, or social structure: “[e]n los dominios del pensamiento, en la libre aplicación de la actividad, en la esfera igualitaria de la justicia y del derecho, el sexo no debe tener ninguna importancia” (*La mujer moderna* 81).

As we examine Burgos’s literary output and its development during the first three decades of the twentieth century (in various genres, including essays, novels, cuentos, and conduct manuals), we can surmise that she promptly realized the restrictive nature of advocating women’s rights and improved education through an exclusive focus on future motherhood. She comprehended that the perpetual glorification of maternity and the ángel del hogar – particularly in Catholic discourse and the middle- and upper-class bourgeois ideology – ultimately served to prevent women’s emancipation. As a celebrated female archetype, the ángel del hogar was portrayed as a near saintly, respected role for women, yet it was dependent on paradoxical characteristics: sexual purity and maternity (motherhood), modeled after the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus (Jagoe and Enríquez 28-33). While critics
have noted pronounced maternalism in Burgos’s early, more conservative ideology, by the mid 1920s she states unequivocally that this public discourse invoking maternity functions primarily to ensure women remain in subordinate social positions (La mujer moderna 63-66). Thus, they withstand a social position akin to that of slaves and blind themselves to the validity of an array of female identities which do not depend on maternity.

Yet perhaps most importantly, just as she believed modern women should no longer be expected to limit themselves to the traditional role of wife and mother, neither did she feel that they should be forced into such a role due to economic necessity, naiveté, lack of education, lack of other opportunities, or even obligation. Interestingly, in a revealing letter written in 1922 to her young and recently married friend Rita, the wife of her close friend and poet Rafael Romero, Burgos divulges quite candid thoughts with respect to the still-prevalent expectation that young women, especially a recién casada, must desire to have children above all else:

¡Los hijos! ¿Para qué quiere usted hijos? […] Yo creo […] que es traer seres, para perpetuar el dolor. En el amor a los hijos hay un gran egoísmo, del que se vale el instinto de la especie para perpetuarse. Se ha favorecido ese instinto cantando la maternidad, que en el fondo no es más que convertirnos en fábricas de hombres para el trabajo y la guerra o de mujeres para el placer… de los otros. ¿Es demasiado fuerte esto para usted, joven y enamorada, que

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95 Establíer Pérez, for example, observes that during the first decade of the twentieth-century, “la exaltación lírica de la maternidad como tarea relevantísima y sacrosanta de la mujer en la sociedad contemporánea, unida a la de su misión de educadora de la humanidad, es una de las constantes del ideario de Carmen de Burgos” (26).

96 Burgos’s further explains this concept of “esclavitud”: “Invocar la maternidad para mantener la esclavitud, envuelve un cinismo superlativo y un desconocimiento inexplicable de la expansión que requiere la actividad de las mujeres que no han sido madres y de las viudas y casadas que, después de criar y educar a sus hijos, terminada la misión materna, tienen energías que reclaman aplicación” (La mujer moderna 64).
In essence, rather than celebrate maternal values as the key to a utopian future, as did other first-wave maternal feminists, Burgos championed a feminist position of gender equality in which motherhood and marriage were seen more practically as an altogether different set of social institutions into which women should be able to voluntarily enter, or cautiously avoid, at their own will. Burgos theorized a hybrid feminism that appreciated the value of women’s voluntary maternal role, while advocating an extensive education which would prepare women professionally, socially, and personally to make this choice with their own best interests in mind. Furthermore, choosing to accept or to reject this maternal role should not be the definitive marker of a woman’s public identity, and Burgos actively encouraged women to maintain a productive life outside the walls of the home.

**Maternity Ward Horrors: Urban Motherhood in *La rampa* (1917)**

Amidst the burgeoning social, economic and urban landscape of early twentieth-century Madrid, there existed a growing demographic of predominantly single women who began to work outside the home as factory workers, telegraphists, domestic servants, nannies and shopkeepers. During the first three decades of the century, Madrid experienced unprecedented growth as a result of a demographic explosion brought on largely by an influx of immigrants – from both the rural regions of Spain and from the international community. Between 1900 and 1930, the Spanish capital doubled its population, reaching nearly one million inhabitants, largely due to the completed railroad station to the north of the city (Julia 146). These newest residents of Madrid sought work in various sectors – politics, industry,
finance, commerce, education, and public works, to name a few. For working-class women seeking employment, the tobacco factory and the nascent textile industry provided them new opportunities to enter the workforce. The construction and renovation of the Gran Vía, and the accompanying increase in shops, theaters, and department stores in the city center, created the possibility for women to work in sales and commune with a diverse, often upper-class, clientele. As for educated women, many earned teaching credentials, and the city offered a variety of instructional appointments in both public and private settings. Additionally, the creation of the Papelera Española propelled journalism within the city space, thus affording educated women, like Carmen de Burgos, the prospect of publishing their fiction, non-fiction, and short articles in diverse presses (Mangini, *Las modernas* 26-29). Yet despite the bustling atmosphere that these modern advances fostered, Madrid remained a “capital de grandes contrastes: centro urbano y pueblo provinciano, barrios decrépitos de aspecto medieval y zonas de bulevares repletos de elegantes comercios y residencias palaciegas” (27); Parsons captures the oxymoronic qualities of the city with her phrase “castizo metropolis” (10-11). These dramatic contrasts were not only evident in the physical make-up and appearance of the city zones and residences, but also in the diverse social classes (upper-middle class bourgeoisie, working-class, beggars, etc.) and the conflation of traditional and modern ideologies that informed the social, cultural and moral sensibilities of this varied populace.

In her novel *La rampa* (1917), Carmen de Burgos presents us with what can be read as a type of *bildungsroman* of these brave and hard-working women who came to Madrid with the hopes of establishing an economically independent and modern lifestyle that would allow them to break free of traditional patriarchal institutions and living arrangements (like
marriage, motherhood, or living under the care of a male relative). In fact, Michael Ugarte credits Carmen de Burgos’s novel with dealing “more thoroughly with the condition of women in the city than any canonical Madrid narrative published in the early twentieth century” (Madrid 95). In La rampa, Burgos’s thorough treatment of the way in which women were forced to navigate what often proved to be an oppressive and debilitating urban environment leaves little to the imagination, and she presents the reader with challenging female ordeals and crude imagery in a rather objective manner. In this respect, Roberta Johnson has emphasized the exceptional character of Burgos’s narrative fiction as a unique and compelling form of “social modernism” that “flies in the face of tradition” (“Carmen de Burgos” 75). Indeed, Burgos’s social consciousness and her implicit, modern critique of traditional patriarchal values and societal structures can be observed in La rampa. However, to understand the spirit of this critique it is imperative to take into consideration the distinctly female readership to which this book is dedicated. The dedication reads as follows: “A toda esa multitud de mujeres desvalidas y desorientadas, que han venido a mí […] y me han hecho sentir su tragedia” (1). In light of the gendered nature of this dedication, it follows that the novel deals with a large portion of themes exhibiting gender-specific social concerns, particularly those unique to the female sex. Nowhere is this more apparent that in Burgos’s portrayal of pregnancy and the general experience of being, or becoming, a mother amidst the relentless demands of a transforming city in the process of rapid expansion and modernization.

Anja Louis has described Burgos’s fiction as a “consciousness-raising exercise” that yields the potential to influence, and even change, the morality and laws of her
contemporary society (165). This is certainly true of La rampa. Yet several critics have appreciated the way in which La rampa’s particular narrative structure also operates as a didactic text that educates young women in the functioning of city life, specifically highlighting the difficulties and injustices inherent in this urban environment (Mangini, Larson, Johnson, Starcevic, Establier Pérez). However, as the novel progresses and develops a distinctly feminine vision of the vicissitudes of urban life, it gravitates towards defining the maternal experience, from pregnancy through the birth and rearing of a child. Through this female-centered focus, Burgos deftly exposes and demystifies the traditionally lyricized concept of motherhood, wherein a woman’s role as a self-sacrificing and wholly domestic mother is lionized not only as the epitome of feminine virtue, but also as her most meaningful and significant social responsibility.

Such an idealization of motherhood had been prevalent for centuries – notably within Catholic discourse and the enduring codes of conduct set forth in Fray Luis’s La perfecta casada. Yet it was strengthened as a result of mid- to late-nineteenth century literature which emphasized women’s “natural” role as self-sacrificing caregiver, wife and mother, as well as by new Catholic doctrines which celebrated the Virgin Mary precisely for her role as a pure,

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97 Following the work of sociologist Stephen Vago, Louis suggests that “changes in law may be induced by a voluntary and gradual shift in society’s morality, thus law can be reactive and follow social change” (164). Louis asserts that “literature can be instrumental in producing this shift in morality through its discussion of controversial issues,” such as divorce, adultery, remarriage or single motherhood (165). She believes that Burgos’s incorporation of these issues into her melodramatic fiction, then, is a way of raising consciousness and feeding into public debate with the hopes of changing public morality, and ultimately the laws of the unjust Código Civil (165).

98 Historically, Nash describes the way in which a traditional Spanish woman’s cultural identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was still largely shaped around her role as wife and mother: “Motherhood figured as the maximum horizon for women’s self fulfillment and social role. Women’s cultural identity was shaped through marriage and motherhood to the exclusion of any other social or professional undertakings. […] By 1910 the biological function of reproduction had already become the key component in structuring women’s cultural identity” (“Un/Contested Identites” 27). This construction is one which many early twentieth-century feminists, like Burgos, began to question and challenge.
saintly mother (Jagoe and Enríquez 28-33). Through Isabel, La rampa’s female-protagonist who endures an unexpected pregnancy and suffers an ultimately tragic experience as a mother in urban Madrid, Burgos dismantles this ongoing idealization and reveals the harsh realities of pregnancy and motherhood to her young female readers. These realities include the institutionalization of single or poor expectant mothers in what were known as “maternity houses,” the economic strain of rearing a child, and the intense physical and psychological challenges that accompany pregnancy and childbirth, especially when experiencing them alone. Climactically, Burgos suggests the futility of finding economic stability, emotional reciprocity, or even happiness in the traditional roles of wife and mother that had for so long defined a woman’s most honorable position within Spanish society.

In La rampa, Burgos portrays the experience of motherhood through her protagonist Isabel, a single, working-class woman in urban Madrid who had been raised in a bourgeois family. When Isabel’s parents pass away leaving her no inheritance, she has no choice but to seek out work, and soon finds herself working as a vendor in Madrid’s trendiest and busiest central Bazar. She shares an apartment with her single friend Águeda who similarly has no familial support. The opening of the novel provides readers with the opportunity to observe the way in which these two women must struggle with basic subsistence, barely escaping

99 Jagoe and Enríquez explain that “muchos textos decimonónicos sobre la mujer” share the goal of characterizing all women based on a supposed “natural” state: “‘La mujer’ no trabaja fuera del hogar, pero cuida de la casa y de sus hijos, a los que amamanta y educa cariñosamente” (28). Key texts include María de Pilar Sinués del Marco’s Ángel del hogar (1859) and Hija, esposa y madre: Carta dedicadas a la mujer acerca de sus deberes para con la familia y la sociedad (1963); Concepción Arenal’s La mujer de su casa (1881); and Luisa Luna’s La misión de la mujer en la sociedad y la familia (1881) (42-47). These scholars also highlight the role that the 1854 proclamation of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, and Pope Leo XIII’s 1895 declaration of the Virgin Mary as “coredentora de la humanidad,” played in reinforcing the celebration of the mother role within Catholic culture (32).

100 The Bazar depicted in the Madrid of La rampa has been described by Ugarte as a sort of ‘precursor to the modern department store’ which had begun to dramatically change the commercial landscape of the city (Madrid 95). Larson documents the exact location of the Bazar depicted in La rampa as being in the most important commercial zone of the time period – between the Plaza Callao and the Puerta del Sol (in Burgos, La rampa 3n).
poverty, despite working long hours, six days each week, for negligible pay. When Isabel falls in love with Fernando, she soon learns that she is pregnant. While initially stunned at the revelation, she soon accepts the fact that she is fulfilling her “misión en la tierra” (97). Isabel is astounded to discover that Fernando reacts with furor and refuses to support her or the child. He even blames her for being careless, suggests that she is entrapping him with her pregnancy, and even implies that the baby is not his. After several months, Isabel is unable to continue working such long hours at the Bazar due to the physical limitations of her pregnancy. Consequently, she has insufficient income with which to support and, in the late months of her pregnancy as she faces increasing physical challenges and limitations, she is forced to seek assistance through Madrid’s charitable maternity hospital, the Casa de Maternidad. The chapters detailing this institution foreground many of the most disturbing, and at times unnerving, descriptions of the realities facing single or poor mothers.

According to Larson, Madrid’s Casa de Maternidad was established in 1859 by a priest, José María Tenorio, subsequently managed by the sisters of the Hermanas de la Caridad, and capable of housing over 900 women annually (xix). Furthermore, during the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, there was a notable increase in the existence of charitable hospitals, especially maternity wards like the Casa de Maternidad, in modern western European cities (Versluysen 19-22). Burgos’s appropriation of this institution as a setting for such a large portion of her novel is a tactical maneuver which amplifies La rampa’s intrinsic didacticism.

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101 Fernando angrily exclaims: “Torpe, más que torpe, ¿cómo has dado lugar a esto? […] Es lo de todas. La traición. Así os creéis que vais a cazar al marido… Salís con la misma historia… No estaria mal si todos fuésemos bobos y nos tragáramos esa bola del hijo… sabe Dios de quién” (98, my emphasis).

102 Versluysen’s study focuses primarily on the “lying-in” hospitals of nineteenth century urban London, but comparisons can be made with similar Western European institutions (see 19-22). Laura V. Marks discusses in great detail the charitable hospitals and maternity wards in modern London, specifically focusing on the women and children housed there and the social and economic implications of these institutions within the city (195-244).
While this institution was established as a charitable refuge to provide food, shelter and medical care for poor mothers, the reality of life in this setting was anything but serene or welcoming. Unlike the way in which Galdós and Baroja had criticized such supposedly benevolent institutions in their narrative fiction, Burgos does not merely expose a general social malady (Ugarte, *Madrid* 100). She delves deeper into the problem, focusing on the explicit – and oftentimes very specific – victimization of pregnant women within this institution (100). Upon entering the maternity ward, Isabel is confronted with a varied female population that embodies “toda la miseria de la hembra […] Eran como despojos míseros de caprichos, arrojadas y despreciadas: piltrafas de mujer” (109). While the principal demographic within this institution was that of single, poor women, in reality the Casa de Maternidad housed a much more heterogeneous group that included poor married women, young, single women from wealthy families wishing to conceal their identities to protect their family’s honor, older women managing an unexpected pregnancy, and even prostitutes. Isabel contemplates the group of women she soon becomes a part of herself:

[…] aquel grupo, formado por medio ciento de mujeres marchitas, macilentas, que parecían cansadas de tirar de sus vientres de hidrópicas […] Algunas de aquellas mujeres eran casadas, que no contando con medios de asistencia iban allí; pero la mayoría eran las madres solteras, las engañadas, las abandonadas. Había mujeres viejas, reincidentes, que ya había dejado allí varios críos, y veían sólo en su maternidad un *accidente físico* desagradable, puramente

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103 Urgarte cites Benito Pérez Galdós’s treatment of the Micaelas Convent in *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1887) and Pío Baroja’s critique of the clinic and its treatment of prostitutes as examples in male literary fiction that engaged in the critique of social institutions created for the purported ‘benefit’ of women and/or society in general (100).
mecánico, del que era preciso salir como de un tifus, o una pulmonía, sin sentimentalismos de ningún género. (108, my emphasis)

While Isabel enters this social institution as an unwed mother with no financial support from the father of her child, La rampa also foregrounds the conspicuous reality that married women faced within the walls of the maternity ward. As she isolates maternity and pregnancy to within this institution for several central chapters of her narrative, Burgos presents a direct, non-romanticized rendering of the maternal experience. In the process, she warns her readers that pregnancy and motherhood, regardless of marital status, have the potential to become immense physical and economic weights for women in modern Madrid.

There are two very telling narrative strategies evident in the above passage during which Isabel surveys maternity in the Casa de Maternidad. First, Burgos conveys the victimization of these women and the overall miserable conditions of life in the Casa de Maternidad. Isabel summarizes the scene that surrounds her as follows: “¡Cuánta tragedia en todo aquello!” (108). Furthermore, the chapters depicting the inhabitants of the institution put forward a precise and descriptive language that gives form to pain, suffering, and illness. The women are consistently labeled as “engañadas, atropelladas, víctimas, vencidas, pobres, abandonadas, medio muertas, con los cuerpos deformados” (108-118). These sober realities of motherhood prove to be far removed from both Isabel’s sense of (reluctant) satisfaction upon discovering she was pregnant, and also from the lifestyle that the ángel del hogar discourse promised. Secondly, Burgos’s literary rendition of the maternal experience relies heavily on a very impersonal, clinical language which had infiltrated, and progressively come to dominate, modern discourses on maternity since the late seventeenth century. Margaret Connor Versluysen explains that “the hospital as an institution implicitly redefined birth as a
state akin to acute illness although its patients were in the natural condition of pregnancy” and, as a result, childbirth was increasingly viewed as a “surgical procedure” by the twentieth century (21-25). In Burgos’s rendition of the Casa de Maternidad, women are not happily awaiting the birth of a beautiful new baby, but rather suffering from what is considered an illness precipitated by the “pólipo, feto, basura, enfermedad, mancha,” or “tumor” within their wombs (123-27). In fact, the words child, son, daughter or baby (hijo/a, niño/a, bebé) are virtually absent from Burgos’s portrayal of the Casa de Maternidad, effectively dehumanizing and devaluing the maternal experience within the walls of this institution. And it is through this portrayal, and a very precise use of impersonal, medical language, that Burgos presents her young female readers with an altogether different, and quite disturbing, facet of the maternal experience.

In accordance with the didacticism of La rampa, the representation of the Casa de Maternidad serves to educate women on the way in which pregnancy was experienced in the city. In order to make appropriate decisions regarding courtship, marriage and motherhood, women needed to be pragmatically informed of the realities which often remained camouflaged by much of the antifeminist rhetoric aimed at quelling women’s emancipation through the glorification of the ángel del hogar and traditional marriage and motherhood. This is particularly relevant to the Casa de Maternidad, as many women were most likely

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104 Versluysen discusses at length the “progressive male medical intrusion into birth management” which continued at an accelerated pace, especially after the seventeenth century (22). While she focuses predominantly on England, she notes that similar developments and transformations of the field took place in other western European countries as well (23). She documents the history of English midwifery, which was originally excluded from medical practices and training due primarily to the fact that it has always been considered a “folk-craft” or “women’s work” (23). As such, “in most pre-industrial societies, midwifery was seen as an extension of the female sex role, and was largely practiced within the confines of a female subculture with only minimal male interference” (23). By the eighteenth century, due to increased medical education offered to men in universities (women were excluded from university education), midwifery had largely come under male medical control (25). Consequently, the language and discourse surrounding childbirth changed, and medical terms such as surgeon, physician, patient, hospital, clinic, instruments and “obstetric forceps” became commonplace, though they had never been used in the era of female midwifery (30-34).
unaware of the idiosyncrasies of this charitable institution. In fact, the actual geographic location of the maternity ward within Madrid obscured the evidence of “immoral” sexual relations, as well as the more unpleasant aspects of pregnancy from the general populous. Along with the Hospital General and the open-air market El Rastro, the Casa de Maternidad and the attached Inclusa (an orphanage) were strategically located on the outskirts of the busy, ever-transforming city center, near the barrios of Embajadores. The narration captures the looming presence of this institution as Isabel reluctantly approaches its doors: “parecía que se había agrupado todo hacia aquel lado para limpiar el núcleo dorado de la ciudad de sus miserias, del mismo modo que se arrojan los muertos lejos, a las afueras, para que la vista del Cementerio y sus emanaciones pútridas no conturben ni contaminen a los habitantes” (103).

The peripheral location of this institution with regards to the city brings to mind Michel Foucault’s formulation of the heterotopia, especially given the way in which Burgos herself compares the location of the Casa de Maternidad to that of the cemetery. I believe Foucault’s heterotopic concept of space is useful for analyzing the Casa de Maternidad, especially given the fact that Burgos puts forth an image of urban maternity that in no way embodies the glorified, unrealistic ideal perpetuated by first-wave conservative feminists and even antifeminist rhetoric (like the Catholic Church and “scientific” studies, for example).

In his well-known article “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault postulates that every culture throughout the world succeeds in constituting heterotopias and, considering such geographical, historical and cultural diversity, these unique spaces inevitably take on varied

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105 In La rampa, the narrator explains that, in her journey to the maternity ward, Isabel heads towards the region of the city know as Embajadores (101). According to historical documents, the Casa de Maternidad was located on the Calle del Mesón de Paredes in Madrid, south and slightly east of the city center near the area known today as Lavapies (‘Historia del Hospital Materno Infantil’). Furthermore, according to the Colegio San Antonio, which is located today on the Calle del Mesón de Paredes next to the old tobacco factory (‘la fábrica de tabaco’ is also mentioned in La rampa), the Casa de Maternidad and the attached Inclusa which Burgos depicts in her novel were situated near what is today La plaza Agustín Lara (‘Calle del Mesón de Paredes’).
forms (24). As “simultaneously mythic and real contestation[s] of the space in which we live,” Foucault divides heterotopias into two main categories: the crisis heterotopia, which is a privileged, sacred or forbidden place reserved for individuals in a state of crisis (adolescents, pregnant women, the elderly), and the heterotopia of deviation, into which individuals are placed whose behavior is deviant from the required norm (criminals, mental patients) (24-25). What is illuminating about the portrayal of the Casa de Maternidad is how it seamlessly falls within the classifications of both a primitive, sacrosanct crisis heterotopia, as admitted women were indeed in a state of crisis (the “crisis” of pregnancy), and a heterotopia of deviation due to the fact that the dominant culture defined single mothers as immoral and dishonorable (that is, as deviants). Furthermore, not only was the moral dishonor attributed to single women considered a deviation from the required norm, but as La rampa suggests, within the early twentieth-century Spanish capital city, pregnancy itself was rapidly becoming an anomalous state, causing inevitable economic strain and physical limitations, especially for modern working women. And thus, Isabel is forced to give up her job at the Bazar, her only source of income, as her pregnancy takes a physical toll on her body.

Curiously, the Casa de Maternidad fulfills each of Foucault’s four remaining principles of heterotopias, each of which illuminates precise, yet problematic, ways in which this institution treated the experience of pregnancy and motherhood. For the purposes of this chapter, however, my analyses will center on two specific principles, which I believe are the most revealing, when juxtaposed with the portrayal of this institution in Burgos’ narrative: the aforementioned first principle and the sixth. In fact, Foucault’s sixth principle of the heterotopia will more adequately demonstrate the way in which the representation of the
Casa de Maternidad in *La rampa* serves to reinforce the didactic goals of the text. Because heterotopias function in relation to the surrounding space, they essentially create a new space that is completely other – another *real* space, as “meticulous as ours is messy and ill constructed” – or what Foucault terms a heterotopia of “compensation” (27). Critics have pointed out that the scenes depicting the Casa de Maternidad in *La rampa* effectively portray a gendered social subculture which functions as a world in itself, a veritable “microcosm of Madrid” (Ugarte, *Madrid* 100). Susan Larson employs similar terminology in her description of the ward’s inhabitants: “Este microcosmo del mundo femenino ejemplifica los dilemas de muchas mujeres solteras de la época” (xix). This institutional space isolates a number of specifically female concerns which are often suppressed, or ignored, in male-dominated city spaces (like the *comedor de todos* of *La rampa*’s first chapter, or even the Bazar).

Through several chapters, Burgos brings to light the tragic realities of the maternal experience in this institution, and provides an objective critique of the Casa de Maternidad and its purportedly benevolent nature through the impartial observations of an omniscient third-person narrator. Furthermore, in addition to this critique of the most visible injustices, Burgos’s text enacts a symbolic critique of the broader social structures and ideologies which are reflected in this particular institution. That is, the preferential treatment or privileges given to some women (and denied others), and the authority figures’ indifferent and unsympathetic demeanors with the pregnant women, are not merely representative of this particular institutional environment, but also of the more general socio-cultural organization of the surrounding city. As a further example, in the maternity ward, social stratification is clearly visible. Women like Isabel who cannot afford to pay for their stay – *las ingenuas y las vencidas*, to use Establier Pérez’s classifiers (22) – are grouped together and referred to as
“las chicas de bata.” The paying “distinguidas,” on the other hand, are housed separately, and enjoy privileges which are not afforded to their less economically stable counterparts. One woman, described as the “librepensadora y revolucionaria,” is vocal about these injustices: “A las chicas de bata se las trata de cualquier modo…, no son como las que pagan… ¡Valiente caridad!” (110).

In addition to the class divisions visible within the Casa de Maternidad, Burgos also exposes hypocritical attitudes towards maternity, and particularly the unfounded preferential treatment reserved for women whose pregnancy occurs within the context of marriage. One married woman in the ward – “la más fiera e intransigente con todas” – arrogantly belittles her comrades: “mi hijo no es de un Juan cualquiera, y llevará los apellidos de su padre. No tengo una barriga de extranjis como éses” (119). Despite the fact that she is one of many chicas de bata within the maternity ward, she is confident that her married status affords her a certain degree of moral superiority. The librepensadora fights back, noting that this woman most likely has to suffer at the hands of a drunk or philandering husband (119). Society’s double-standard surrounding maternity – the idea that only married mothers deserve respect, while single mothers are scorned – comes to light in the Casa de Maternidad. In reality, Burgos herself was well aware of this contradictory and discriminatory practice: “No se compaginan esos cantos a la maternidad, esa protección de que se quiere rodear a la madre, esa exaltación que de ella se hace, con el desprecio a la madre soltera” (Burgos, La mujer moderna 91).

Further criticism is directed towards the arrogance and contempt of the nuns who managed the ward, the disturbing lack of hygiene and cleanliness, the ubiquity of physical and psychological pain, and the trauma of death and/or separation of mothers and

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106 Burgos later elaborates in La mujer moderna y sus derechos: “Resulta además anómalo que se ensalce la maternidad y se veje a la madre que tiene el hijo fuera de matrimonio” (222).
children. Considering the principles of the heterotopia outlined above, the highly organized, hierarchical structure of the institution itself actually mirrors the city space which surrounds it, exposing the haphazard and chaotic nature of the similarly divided and modern social landscape. In other words, through the portrayal of the Casa de Maternidad as a heterotopic space, Burgos makes clear to her readers that pregnancy has become increasingly redefined as a debilitating state not merely within this institution, but within modern urban society as well.

It is clear that Burgos weaves this critique into her narrative throughout the novel, especially through Isabel’s scrutiny and reflective commentary regarding life inside the maternity ward. Isabel laments the dismal and largely pessimistic atmosphere of the Casa de Maternidad: “La madre tan líricamente cantada aparecía envuelta en toda la realidad de su miseria física y repugnante. Pobres mujeres vejadas, atropelladas, víctimas de deseos innobles, de la brutalidad de los hombres, que las arrojaban lejos de ellos después de la saciedad” (108-09). However, it is also through these same critiques that the didactic goals of the text are revealed, specifically regarding motherhood and pregnancy. In the Casa de Maternidad, Isabel is confronted firsthand with a reality that utterly contradicts any romanticized notions of maternity and the ángel del hogar with which she may have been indoctrinated. In her 1927 essay on the legal and social position of Spanish women, La mujer moderna y sus derechos, Burgos prioritizes the need to disillusion women of this false depiction of lyricized motherhood: “En la teoría todo es elevar la maternidad de una manera lírica, llegando a hacer una cosa semidivina de una función meramente animal, pues el hecho de dar a la luz no constituye un mérito ni una excelsitud” (217). This is indeed a very candid, and at first glance even derogatory, depiction of women’s reproductive capacity.
Nevertheless, recalling that Burgos’s feminist stance argues for women and men to be considered equals in all social sectors, it becomes clear that rather than disparaging maternity itself, she is instead chastising the conservative ideology which distorts and misrepresents the maternal experience in order to prevent women from taking interest in more public, worldly affairs. Maryellen Bieder summarizes this view as Burgos later expressed it in *La mujer moderna y sus derechos*. In Bieder’s opinión, “Burgos rechaza la exaltación tradicional de la figura femenina como madre, considerando que la idealización de la maternidad no es más que una forma de la esclavitud que niega valor y funciones a las mujeres sin hijos” (“Carmen de Burgos” 235). Furthermore, Burgos rejects the privileging of maternity not only on the grounds that it subordinates women, but also that it fosters further inequality in the private sphere of the home: “es absurdo también elevar la maternidad sobre la paternidad. Cualquier desigualdad sea como sea, en el hogar, perjudica a la familia toda” (*La mujer moderna* 218). While Burgos only explicitly states this more radical stance later in *La mujer moderna*, a more politically and legally compromised journalistic diatribe, her portrayal of Isabel’s experience as a mother in *La rampa* elucidates these same fundamental concerns.\(^{107}\)

While the institutionalization of motherhood within Madrid was one area in which women like Isabel were in need of education, a second aspect of motherhood which was typically absent from educational discourse was the enormous physical and psychological toll of pregnancy within the urban environment. As Ugarte has rightly noted in his study of *La rampa*, in Isabel’s pregnancy “the city’s harms are now physical as well as psychological” (*Madrid* 100). Though women entering the public sphere may have anticipated varying

\(^{107}\) In *La mujer moderna*, Burgos spends considerable time critiquing many of Spain’s very specific legal codes and laws which she believed unjustly discriminated against women and served to maintain female subordination. For example, she discusses social issues ranging from paternity investigations, divorce, adultery, child custody and even infanticide as they appear in the laws and articles upheld by the constitution (10-12).
degrees of verbal and physical harassment, many did not comprehend the way in which this same type of abuse could be potentially compounded within the confines of their own interpersonal relations. In the case of Isabel, despite her long working hours and her constant battle to survive as a single, working woman in the city, she finds solace in her relationship with Fernando. The two frequent the movie theaters, enjoying the freedom this cinematic “refugio” provides young lovers, and they attend the *verbena del Carmen* which Isabel describes as “una ciudad feliz cuyos habitantes no tuviesen que pensar más que en el festejo y el bienestar” (77-81). During this time of *carnaval*, social norms were relaxed or even suspended altogether in this “ciudad feliz,” and young people in Madrid frequently engaged in more carefree, even promiscuous conduct (81).

The Bakhtinian interpretation of carnival fits well here, as the Russian philosopher suggests that such festivals represented the celebration of a “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the establish order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and *prohibitions*” (Bakhtin 10, emphasis mine). In *La rampa*, for example, the effects of *carnaval* are later felt in the *Casa de Maternidad*; the nuns lament that “las locuras de Carnaval” are directly responsible for the higher admittance rate of single, pregnant women expecting children in November (106). Furthermore, Isabel and Fernando enjoy a ride alone in a horse-drawn carriage outside the city, during which they kiss and even

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108 One of the women admitted shares her experience of “la vida madrileña en su desbordamiento de los días de Carnaval” in which she had sexual relations with a masked man (“un enmascarado”) who then abandons her, leaving her pregnant with a child she refers to as “el hijo de la máscara” (121-23). Furthermore, within the Casa de Maternidad, the narrator explains: “El hijo de la máscara tomaba un carácter extraordinario, como si ya no fuese el hijo del hombre, sino un monstruoso engendro” (123). This mask may be understood symbolically as the “faceless” and perhaps nameless men who were responsible for women having to resort to a lonely, miserable stay in the Casa de Maternidad to await the birth of their child. For Burgos, the specific identity of the men involved did not matter; what was significant in each instance was the complete victimization of women by these men, coupled with the fact that the men were entirely absent from the maternal experience, and often even from the lives of their children. Burgos’s protagonist finally comes to this realization as well when she compares the frightening story of the “hijo de la máscara” with the current state of her (non-existent) relationship with Fernando: “ya sería Fernando un desconocido para ella, y que podrían verse dentro del olvido, de la indiferencia, después de sus días de pasión” (199).
pretend to be a married couple (85-91). Yet all the while, Isabel is portrayed as naïve and exceedingly idealistic, believing she is fortunate beyond measure to have found such a “perfect” partner: “¡Pobrecillas, no era ninguna tan amada como ella! Si supieran su felicidad todas aquellas personas que pululaban por el Bazar le hubieran tenido envidia” (76).

As Fernando’s and Isabel’s relationship develops, they give in to their growing sexual desire. The narrator implies that Isabel makes this decision by her own free will, aware of her social position as an independent, self-sufficient modern woman: “No es que había perdido el conocimiento ni había caído en esa inconsciencia que suelen alegar las mujeres como causa de su abandono. No. Había rendido la voluntad por una decisión suprema. Había que aprovechar aquel ardor que existía en el fondo de cada uno, que era su única fortuna” (92). However Isabel’s idealism clearly clouds her thought processes, thus preventing an informed, practical decision. That is to say, she does not consider the consequences of her actions, but rather her “rational” self appears merely to justify the antiquated moral ideology based on the virtuous notion of the domestic ángel del hogar from which she purportedly had already distanced herself: “Aunque ella, trabajadora e independiente, tenía ya algo superior de mujer emancipada, […] no acababa de perder los prejuicios de aquel otro mundo que había sido el suyo, como señorita burguesa y casadera” (84). When Isabel later falls ill, it is only through the statement by another woman (“[Con] cada chico que yo he tenido me ha pasado igual”) that Isabel even entertains the idea that pregnancy could be the possible cause of her deteriorating health, and the suggestion bewilders her: “Se quedó aterrada ante estas palabras, que eran una revelación” (97). The cautionary tale at work with Isabel casts her as a naïve woman who suffers from the both the silence surrounding female sexuality, and a
corresponding ineffectual sexual education (another social issue which many first-wave-feminists struggled to reform).  

Throughout *La rampa*, Burgos continuously reveals the way in which a large portion of Madrid’s female population was similarly naïve, uneducated, or even entirely oblivious to the real consequences of sexual relations. In the Casa de Maternidad, pregnancy is experienced as “un accidente físico desagradable […] un descuido” (108). Women are “engañadas” and “abandonadas,” finding themselves “otra vez embarazada[s], sin saber cómo” (119). It is only those working closest to the suffering women in the Casa de Maternidad who realize the errors of a sexual “education” rooted in conservative values of honor and purity. The bases for this so-called education were not medical or scientific facts, but rather the patriarchal preoccupation with controlling familial honor and women’s sexuality. Several of the nuns allude to the way that this conservative rhetoric surrounding sexual relations was proving insufficient, noting that the young mothers in this institution had clearly rejected “ese pudor falso, acomodaticio, que trata de mantener a las vírgenes en la ignorancia de los misterios de la reproducción y hace que se les diga que los niños vienen en cestitas de París o que los traen los cigüeñas de un país desconocido” (136). Through such commentary on pregnancy and sexual relations in *La rampa*, Burgos demonstrates the debilitating effects that the promotion of the mythical ángel del hogar continued to have on

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109 For more information on sexual education in Spain, see Allison Sinclair’s *Sex and Society in Early Twentieth Century Spain* (2007). Sinclair makes particular mention of the difficulties facing sexual reform efforts in Spain, given that “both conservative and traditional aims were to be found among the reformers themselves” (8-9). See also Ann Taylor Allen’s *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970* (2005), particularly “Too Old to Believe in the Stork: The Campaign for Sex Education” in chapter 4 (93-97). Finally, Glick’s article, “Sexual Reform, Psychoanalysis, and the Politics of Divorce in Spain in the 1920s and 1930s” (2003) provides an informative analysis of the impact of the politics of sex reform on social issues.

110 A similar view is expressed early in the novel by the revolucionario Joaquín who befriends Isabel and her friend Agueda in the early chapters of the text, then later emerges as Agueda’s fiancé towards the end of the novel. Joaquín expresses amazement at the fact that women in Spain are not terrified of the prospect of having children, even in desperate economic situations: “el error era el educarlas para mantenerlas en la esclavitud, ocultarles la verdad de la vida por un falso pudor y confundir la ignorancia con la inocencia” (40).
Specifically, such conservative, patriarchal ideology was a major contributing factor to women’s lack of education and social consciousness. The continued exaltation of this traditional feminine ideal served to both restrict women to domestic life, and ultimately prevent their more extensive participation in public life.

In addition to the institutionalization of maternity and women’s ignorance with regards to the socioeconomic implications of an unexpected pregnancy, *La rampa* further elaborates the remarkable physical changes that pregnant women endure through the term of their pregnancy. As an “enfermedad,” pregnancy is shown to debilitate, even invade the female body. In addition to aforementioned impersonal, clinical vignettes of the suffering women residing in the Casa de Maternidad, the maternal transformation of Isabel’s body – and psyche – is symbolically conveyed to the reader in a moment of self (mis)recognition.

Before entering the maternity ward, Isabel regards her body in a reflective shop window: “Su cuerpo era sólo un enorme vientre, sostenido por las piernas, que parecían más cortas y débiles” (104). Initially, Isabel fails to recognize this “other,” this unfamiliar, almost grotesque distortion, as her own self:

¿Era ella aquella mujer flácida, de facciones abultadas, hinchadas, en medio de su demacración, con el rostro cansado, caído; cubiertas las mejillas por el paño amarillento que parecía también velarle los ojos, dándole esa expresión peculiar de las embarazadas; esa mirada opaca que parece convertir sus pupilas en los cristales de unos lentes a través de los cuales quisieran ver otros ojos? (104)

Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection can shed some light on the peculiarities of Isabel’s “grotesque” transformation during pregnancy.
According to Kristeva, the abject is an indefinable other that besets the subject, that “lies outside […] And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master” (Powers of Horror 1-2). The presence of this other effectively interrogates the identity of the subject (the “I”), haunting it with a “vortex of summons and repulsion” that confuse and transgress the subject’s boundaries of self-definition (1-2). Despite such agitation, the subject continues to endure this abject, this non-object, because it imagines it to be the desire of this other (2). As Kristeva explains it: “A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been […] now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing” (2). In this sense, Kristeva’s concept of the abject offers us a wide range of interpretations regarding boundaries and definitions of the self-other binary opposition, and it is particularly useful in shedding light on Isabel’s concept of self, both before and after giving birth. While Isabel experienced a sense of repulsion at her appearance, and at her uncanny misinterpretation of self during pregnancy, upon giving birth to her daughter she notices an uncanny physical void: “¿Y su barriga? No se había dado bien cuenta de que no tenía su barriga. Se encontraba vacía, alisada […] un hueco” (142). For Isabel, both her pregnant body and the child growing in her womb are, and were, conceived as abject concepts: separate and loathsome to some degree, and yet simultaneously familiar others within the dominion of the self. In this paradoxical position, Burgos makes clear the way in which the pregnant body and fetus both define and destabilize a woman’s ego and concept of self as they actively remap her corporal limitations and boundaries of self within the urban context. This is indeed a necessary project, and by excluding that which presents itself to her as abject, Isabel focuses her attention on the place where meaning has collapsed
in order to prepare herself for a new beginning. Or in Kristevean terms, she readies for a “resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego)” (Powers 15).

The principles of abjection further operate in the general description of the maternal experience as it develops within the confines of the Casa de Maternidad, particularly owing to the institution’s overall detached, clinical atmosphere. Relevant to these descriptions is Kristeva’s explanation of the way in which refuse, uncleanliness, and especially corpses, represent the utmost of abjection for they neither recognize nor adhere to boundaries of any sort; put another way, they encroach upon and dismantle those borders which had been firmly established as a means of defining and delineating identities, until no intelligible meaning remains (Powers of Horror 3-4). She describes the corpse, for example, as “death infecting life […] It is something rejected from which one does not part from which one does not protect oneself as from an object” (4). In La rampa, a nauseous portrayal of the misery endured during childbirth exposes the reader to vivid, execrable images of motherhood which clearly evoke Kristeva’s formulation of the abject:

Llegaban allí las embarazadas que sufrían hijos, hemorragias, erupciones y males de boca, de ojos; enfermedades que atacaban al feto […] Había que operar todos los días quistes, tumores, cánceres. Siempre el bisturí cortando carne. Se tiraban cubetas enteras de sangre y pus, y quedaban amontonadas en un barreño las piltrafas, como entrañas palpitantes y sanguinolentas. (126)

This sight is immediately described as an “espectáculo de dolor y de suciedad,” with pregnant women passing through this operating room in vegetative, unresponsive states (126). Later in the narrative, Isabel sums up the grotesque conditions of the ward in similar
terms: “Era un espectáculo doloroso y repugnante al mismo tiempo el contemplar toda la
suciedad y todo el agobio de la maternidad” (141).

In tandem with this shocking portrayal of these normative procedures, *La rampa*
effectively depicts an environment in which the medical facilities and instruments can
facilitate disease among women: “Era necesario toda la escrupulosa limpieza y vigilancia de
los médicos para evitar la propagación de enfermedades y terribles contagios” (126). Again,
Kristeva elucidates that it is not “lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what
disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-
between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4, my emphasis).111 Burgos demonstrates, through
explicit language, the way in which pregnancy, maternity and even motherhood have become
themselves abject concepts, first within the Casa de Maternidad, and again in the broader
urban landscape which is mirrored in this heterotopic institution. If we recall the ambiguous,
dual role of the Casa de Maternidad as both a deviation and a crisis heterotopia, situated both
within the city yet separate from it, it seems the very presence of this institution actually
disturbs attempts to order the chaotic urban society. In this environment, pregnancy,
maternity and motherhood are defined and viewed as unsettling, even threatening states of
being. As a result, this institutional microcosm of urban motherhood draws attention to the
nebulous distinctions between what society chooses to consider a natural, desirable female
condition for the ángel del hogar, and a repugnant, inconvenient disruption of personal – and
social – identity for the single woman.

111 In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva outlines the principles of abjection predominantly in her first chapter,
“Approaching Abjection.” In this essay, she expands on the significance of this concept outside the subject,
particularly in art and religion. She posits that the abject is closely tied to religion and art (specifically modern
literature and avant-garde poetry), each of which are capable of purifying the abject and providing the subject
with a form of catharsis (15-17). She discusses the abject in conjunction with the writings of Dostoyevsky,
Proust, Joyce, Borges, and Artaud (18-26). Throughout the work, she places abjection, and the subject who
experiences it (the deject), within a framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis, “at the crossroads of phobia,
obsession, and perversion” (45).
Just as her pregnancy and her experience in the Casa de Maternidad were clearly different from what a former “mujer burguesa” would have anticipated, so too is Isabel’s ensuing experience as a mother. Facing the challenges of single motherhood, Isabel is instantly aware of “el eterno problema de la mujer, el problema de su hijo” (99). Such a realist depiction of Isabel’s maternal experience further educates Burgos’s readership by forcing them to rigorously conceptualize the reality of bringing a child into the world: “antes había experimentado todo el dolor y la miseria de la maternidad física, ahora sufría todo el dolor y el desencanto de su maternidad moral. La sentía pesar sobre ella, imponiéndole las más duras obligaciones, y esclavizándola por un sentimentalismo del que no se podía liberar” (135). Burgos’s use of the word “esclavizar” is crucial to the novel’s didactic aim. For all intents and purposes, Isabel now enters into another form of social bondage. The process of being discharged from the Casa de Maternidad discourages women from leaving their children in the orphanage, the Inclusa.112 Unfortunately, given the very limited financial resources provided to these women, if they choose to keep their child their only recourse is often to find the father of their child in hopes of receiving financial support. Moreover, some women in the institution have even higher hopes: “Unas tenían esperanza, llevándose al hijo, de conmover al padre y llegar hasta a casarse” (117). Within the institution this notion indeed appeals to those women who knew the identity of their child’s father, and it was certainly preferable to remaining a single mother. In La rampa, however, Burgos also demystifies these aspirations, proving them to be illusory fantasies when enacted outside the walls of this protective institution amidst the increasing economic demands of modern life in Madrid.

112 In La rampa, the week following childbirth in the Casa de Maternidad is described in the following way: “Pero durante aquellos siete días trataban de encariñarlas con sus hijos, hacienda que les dieran el pecho; procuraban que sintieran el impulso de no abandonarlos, obligándoles a entregáros ellas mismas; pero no se cuidaba de proteger a la madre deseosa de conservarlos, y que tenía que doblegarse ante la pobreza y la falta de medios de vida” (142).
In the Casa de Maternidad, women who could not care for their children outside of the institution had the option to leave their children in the attached orphanage, the Inclusa. Those who most frequently felt compelled to abandon their children were single mothers, given that they could not continue earning a living wage if they had a child to care for at home, or they had been forced to hide their maternity “como una vergüenza” (142). The desirability of this process was contingent on a woman’s economic circumstance, and those who paid a higher monthly rate could visit their children, while those lacking the means to pay virtually forfeited visitation rights. Immediately after describing this lamentable system by which some women reluctantly, and painfully, left their children in the Inclusa, a large ellipsis appears in the narration. In the following chapter, Burgos transposes her protagonist to a domestic setting, where she busily cares for her daughter alongside Fernando. Readers soon learn that Isabel’s closest friend, Águeda, had arranged to reunite the two former lovers. Despite the initial portrait of domestic bliss, Isabel soon learns that the reality of motherhood and domestic life do not live up to the ideal lauded by the Casa de Maternidad. Much like during her pregnancy, her new domestic reality quickly disillusioned Isabel, and she explains the reality of her circumstances to Águeda: “Ahora que he llegado a conseguir casi toda la felicidad que puede tener una mujer, cuando he logrado lo que me parecía un imposible, es cuando me encuentro más desgraciada, más sola” (147). For Isabel, her current situation is extremely limiting, once again proving to be a long way from her initial feelings of optimistic ‘alegría’ which she described upon learning she was pregnant.113

113 In this earlier passage, after revealing her initial sense of shock and confusion, the narrator describes Isabel’s happiness: “Aquél hijo era un don que debía a su amor, y sentía agradecimiento hacia Fernando por hacerle conocer esa felicidad. Ahora le parecía que era su esposa legítima, que estaba unida a él con un lazo que aumentaba su amor y su confianza y que no se podría romper” (97).
The reality of Isabel’s situation upon becoming a mother requires a drastic rewriting of her previous sentiment: “Ahora, sentía el vacío de su falta de independencia, de su servidumbre, de su desigualdad respecto a Fernando” (147). But Isabel’s enslavement is not merely confined to the walls of her home; rather it extends into every aspect of her life. When her infant daughter, Fernandita, falls ill, Isabel must journey to the clinic, another modern institution where misery and uncertainty prevailed: “Se veía allí el calvario de la madre. La servidumbre y la tristeza de la maternidad. Los padres no iban nunca. Eran ellas, las pobres mujeres, las que soportaban todo el fardo de los dolores” (154, my emphasis). Isabel endures a dual form of subjugation: On one hand, the constant vigilance and care that her infant daughter demands effectively enslaves Isabel within the home; on the other hand, the child’s very existence is a constant, tangible reminder of this young mother’s unfavorable social position: “El hijo era como una huella, una marca de esclavitud que él había puesto sobre su cuerpo” (148). Águeda makes this clear to Isabel when the two discuss their strained friendship: “Tú ya no eres libre como antes…” (157). As the ángel del hogar, Isabel must sacrifice her friendships in deference to her duties as a wife and mother, she is forced to give up these main sources of external support and public contact: “No había ido Águeda ni ninguna de sus antiguas amigas […] ni ninguna de sus conocidas la trataban ya desde que vivía con Fernando” (180).114

114 The relationship between Águeda and Joaquín remains in the background throughout the final chapters of the novel. While Águeda is initially described as having lost her freedom as well (“No era ya libre Águeda tampoco. Detrás de ella estaba Joaquín”) (180), this relationship is continually praised as being based on mutual respect and true love: “La unión de Águeda y Joaquín no era de esas uniones vulgares, precipitadas, en las que el ardor de la juventud es el único factor que las regula. Era la unión formada por el mutuo afecto, la semejanza de gustos y la estimación. No había entre ellos aquel recelo que sentía Fernando de que Isabel pudiera formular quejas o hacer comparaciones. Era un amor firme, seguro, sincero. Los dos trabajaban con alegría y la casa estaba llena de luz y de bienestar” (183). Interestingly, though it is not elaborated on and remains far in the background of the main narrative, the reader later discovers that Águeda has also entered a life of domesticity based on motherhood, however hers is described as a “vida feliz y enamorada” (195).
Finally, Fernandita’s tragic death shatters both Isabel’s illusions and her relationship with Fernando, as she finally accepts that Fernando no longer loves her. Isabel is rendered helpless and, despite her “deseo de huir, de escapar de allí,” she knows that she cannot, as she has nowhere to go and no means to support herself (182). In the end, it is Fernando who flees, leaving behind only a letter and some spare change. Burgos exposes this double standard with the subtle, almost sarcastic observation: “Se creía así un perfecto caballero que podía vanagloriar de su conducta” (182). As a woman, Isabel was unable to leave her situation, despite her misery and suffering; in contrast, Fernando was easily able to escape this former life knowing that he could find work elsewhere and begin anew. Isabel, having lost her job, suffered through pregnancy, childbirth, motherhood, and finally a failed relationship, is left abandoned and alone. Through the life experiences of this unfortunate protagonist, Burgos creates a learning opportunity for young female readers who may admire the falsely glorified concept of maternal and domestic bliss painted by the anti-feminist rhetoric surrounding the ángel del hogar.

In the end, the crude realities drawn in La rampa concerning motherhood function not only as a creative means for Burgos to disseminate her own increasingly liberal feminist ideology, but also as a way of educating a growing female urban population on how city life restricted and abused women – particularly mothers – of all ages and social class. In La mujer moderna y sus derechos, Burgos states clearly that a modern feminist woman must be conscious of her choices and her rights; she must strive to be “[una mujer] respetada, consciente, con personalidad, con responsabilidad, con derechos, que no se oponen al amor,”

115 “Fernando y ella se miraron como si no se conocieran bien, con una mirada de extrañeza. Se había ido algo de los dos, lo que los ligaba, lo que los mantenía unidos. Veían bien claro que ya no se amaban en sí” (182). In fact, their ensuing arguments bring about feelings of pure hatred, and Fernando shows his true colors: “En su desamor, Fernando aparecía tal como era. Brusco, seco, dispuesto a no continuar” (182). He belittles Isabel for her financial decisions, chastises her and accuses her of not being an honest woman.
al hogar y a la maternidad” (70, my emphasis). Furthermore, she defines the “mujer inconsciente” as a woman “sin concepto de su esclavitud, que está abandonada en una casa que no merece el nombre de hogar, vituperada por el marido, fracasada en todas sus ilusiones” (92). For Burgos, a modern feminist must gain consciousness of her social surroundings and individual situation through a comprehensive education which will prepare her to become more than solely a wife and mother. She even states that the greatest difficulty facing the feminist movement in Spain is not entirely the opposition of men, religion, or other patriarchal institutions, but “las mismas mujeres” (La mujer moderna (64). Her fear is that female contemporaries too often remain ignorant, unconscious, content with their submission, scared of freedom, and ultimately, “acostumbradas a la esclavitud” (64). By way of the unromanticized tale that unfolds in La rampa, Burgos fosters an educated awareness, an enlightening, a profound consciousness which was necessary for the modern “mujer consciente” española. If we recall that as early as 1900, Burgos expressed her preoccupation with the insufficient education afforded to young Spanish women, we can more clearly see the steadfast trajectory of her feminist agenda. In “La educación de la mujer,” Burgos draws attention to the superior education available to women in other European countries (namely France and Switzerland) and America, which adequately prepared them for a variety of fulfilling “profesiones, carreras, artes y empleos” (70). She contrasts this practice with the lamentable fact that, in Spain “la mujer no tiene más carrera que el matrimonio” (71). Seventeen years later in La rampa, Burgos criticizes and demystifies the idealized social roles of wife and mother, largely in response to the dominant patriarchal ideology which, aiming to quell the burgeoning feminist movement in Spain, continued to evoke these domestic roles as desirable “careers” representing the epitome of feminine honor and
virtue. The oppressive nature of these traditional roles is brought to light through Isabel’s pregnancy, first in her experience in the Casa de Maternidad, and then as the ángel del hogar after the birth of her child.

Of further importance is the fact that Burgos’s realist presentation of disenchanted motherhood contains no final catharsis. That is, while it is true that La rampa exhibits many characteristics of the bildungsroman, the novel’s finale does not leave us with a hopeful vision of the protagonist’s successful integration into modern society. On the contrary, Burgos presents a pessimistic vision, and Isabel finally succumbs to yet another institution for women, the Colegio de Criadas, referred to as a “prisión disimulada, un purgatorio, una casa gris” (205-06). Thus, La rampa’s didactic value proves to be twofold. On the one hand, it presents a cautionary narrative of the city’s ills through the struggles of a defeated, and ultimately disillusioned, heroine who slides to the lowermost mantle of Madrid’s socioeconomic “rampa.” On the other hand, Burgos’s novel provides us with a powerful counter-discourse that serves to challenge the anti-feminist rhetoric elevating the traditional ángel del hogar to a virtual fairy-tale reality. Essentially, her novel is the antithesis of the traditional fairy tale, and it becomes all the more poignant through the vivid, ultimately defeatist realism that unapologetically destroys those traditional cultural paradigms to which women were encouraged to uncritically adhere.

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116 Once again, while this feminist stance is clearly visible in La rampa and dramatized for a diverse reading public, Burgos more explicitly states her position on this issue in her later text, La mujer moderna: “En la teoría se enaltece así la función maternal para animar a la mujer, engañando su vanidad, y que no rehúya la perpetuidad de la especie, en la que tanto dolor hay para ella, se la encadena en la práctica, a lo que pudiera llamarse maternidad obligatoria. Se invoca la maternidad como uno de los motivos que deben retenerla en el hogar apartada de toda otra actividad, como si el papel exclusivo de la mujer fuese el de madre y esposa” (219).

117 In contrast to bildungsromans, fairy tales or romances, the final lines of the La rampa read as follows: “Había llegado al final de la rampa. No sentía la violencia del ir cayendo. Estaba en el fin, en el extremo, en el momento de poderse sentar, aunque definitivamente vencida” (207).
Wife and Mother, or Monster? Exploring Female Subjectivity and the Maternal Dilemma in Carmen de Burgos’s *Quiero vivir mi vida* (1931)

While in 1917 Carmen de Burgos dedicated *La rampa* to the multitude of working women in urban Madrid for whom she had the utmost respect and compassion, in 1931 she dedicates her final novel, *Quiero vivir mi vida* to one specific individual: “al ilustre doctor Marañón, que de modo tan competente, sereno y noble, ha estudiado la intersexualidad, iluminando este problema con luces de ciencia y de piedad” (1). This can readily be explained by the fact that the principal component of her protagonist’s characterization is in fact based on the research of this well-known Spanish endocrinologist, Dr. Gregorio Marañón. Marañón’s controversial theories regarding intersexuality, masculinity, and femininity, were quite popular with the 1920s Spanish readership who had recently been introduced to Freud. 118 In fact, Thomas F. Glick has described doctor Marañón as “Spain’s authoritative voice on sexual matters” and identifies three factors which buttressed this authority (77). First, Marañón had an international reputation, which many Spanish scientists did not; second, he was adept at popularizing his ideas such that they appealed to middle-class readers; and third, “he had fought a lonely battle… on behalf of elementary measures like pregnancy leaves for women, which

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118 See Glick’s informative article, “Sexual Reform, Psychoanalysis, and the Politics of Divorce in Spain in the 1920s-1930s for details on the reception of Freud’s ideas in Spain, and Marañón’s exact position within the scientific community, his role in the sexual reform movement, and his (highly nuanced) relationship to feminism. Glick notes that when Freud’s complete works were published in Spanish in the 1920s, it was the first time that the Austrian psychoanalyst’s essays had been made available those Spanish intellectuals outside the medical community who did not read German, and their impact was especially notable on writers and artists like Vicente Aleixandre, Federico García Lorca, Salvador Dalí, and Luis Buñuel (72). In his article, Glick explains that Marañón could be considered a Freudian (though the doctor himself rejected this label), in the sense that he “accepted the validity of the sexual etiology of neurosis and infantile sexuality” and read Freud as a tool with which to support his own biological theories of sexual conduct (71-72). Yet Marañón had no psychoanalytic practice, nor did he accept the “worldview” implied by Freud’s views (71-72). As Glick views it, “The popularization of Freud in Spain coincided with the maturation of both the sexual reform movement and political feminism. Marañón had commented in 1920 that Spanish feminism … was still inorganic, amorphous, and embryonic, lacking medullae and nerves. By the end of the 1920s, Freudian theory had come to constitute one of those medullae” (72). As such, Glick believes that the focal point of feminism in 1920s Spain was not “women’s rights,” but rather sexual dysfunction (76).
created a deep wellspring of gratitude among Spanish middle-class and even working-class women” (77-78). As a champion of middle- and working-class women’s rights, Burgos also had great respect for the doctor as a fellow intellectual, and she admits to seeking out his influence for the plot of her final novel. Burgos states: “[Q]uiero aprovechar mi experiencia y al que él acumule sobre otras mujeres para plasmarla en una novela. Se llamará Quiero vivir mi vida y por supuesto que ya he pensado dedicársela al doctor, que me obsequia con un magnífico prólogo” (qtd. in Utrera 457). Mangini is quick to point out that this admiration was mutual, and that Marañón had praised Burgos’s work on a number of occasions, and did so again in his prologue to her final novel (“The female” (20). While these two intellectuals had obvious respect for one another, Burgos’s feminism was clearly at odds with much of Marañón’s research, particularly his hypothesis that women’s biological destiny was maternity.

In her final novel, Burgos appropriates, explores, and finally criticizes several key hypotheses and arguments from Marañón’s recent popular essays, *Tres ensayos sobre la vida sexual* (1926) and *La evolución de la sexualidad y los estados intersexuales* (1929). That is, Burgos employs Marañón’s scientific (or medical) concept of “intersexuality” as a literary device – a paradigm of sorts onto which she can map her social critique. For Marañón, intersexuality was a diagnosis given to cases in which “coinciden en un mismo individuo – sea hombre, sea mujer – estigmas físicos o funcionales de los dos sexos; ya mezclados en proporciones equivalentes o casi equivalentes” (“La evolución” 4). Furthermore, both historians and literary critics have emphasized the importance of Marañón’s theory of intersexuality as a precursor to his ideas on homosexuality (Bell; Glick; Lacadena; Pinillos; Mangini). In Burgos’s novel, however, Marañón’s terminology serves not merely to characterize the protagonist as a neurotic

119 Specifically, Mangini notes that Marañón has praised Burgos’s “ground-breaking” essay, *La mujer moderna y sus derechos* on several occasions, largely, however, while defending himself from antifeminist accusations (“The Female” 20, 32n).
wife plagued by what men of science perceive to be hysteric, “intersexual” impulses, nor as a woman confused by her sexuality. On the contrary, this language serves to symbolically reveal the dangers of attempting to define a woman and her “appropriate” social role based purely on her biological capacity to bear children. By deconstructing Marañón’s own theory of intersexuality in a way that reveals the arbitrary nature of the gender roles and traits he attempts to assign to and naturalize among the female sex in his essays, Burgos effectively destabilizes his scientific hypothesis and its credibility. In this novel, Burgos’s protagonist, also named Isabel, is a young, recently married upper-class woman who is completely averse to motherhood – much to her husband’s and extended family’s dismay. I propose that, by utilizing Marañónian intersexuality as an element of Isabel’s characterization, the feminist author metaphorically reveals the ramifications of the “maternal dilemma” as both a new-found opportunity for voluntary motherhood, and also as a potential crisis of female subjectivity. In the process, Burgos demonstrates the way in which modern Spanish women who may choose to avoid the traditional maternal role are left with only an illusory concept of freedom and agency with regards to their individual subjectivity.

Burgos was no stranger to new scientific and medical debates, nor to the increasing emphasis on, and faith placed in, modern pragmatism and rational intellectual activity as a means of revitalizing the Spanish nation as it entered modernity (Nuñez Rey 349-51). As Art Berman has declared, in this new era of modernity, “human rationality will predominate, subordinating irrationality, custom, and superstition” (3). In fact, in an article written for

120 Berman’s Preface to Modernism posits that human rationality will predominate over traditional customs “with the efficacy to plan for and attain progressive improvements in all social institutions through the free exercise of will. Humans will have the ability to understand nature as it is – real, solid, and lawfully dependable – which diminishes dependence on theological or transcendental concepts” (3). The idealism behind this notion is evident, and Berman’s critique of modernity rests upon the observation that “modernity had failed to recognize its limitations, its intellectualized onesidedness” (8). As an aesthetic, modernism occurs inside
El Heraldo, Burgos attacks the Italian psychiatrist César Lombroso, and defends Spanish women from his assertion that they are too “inculta y fanática” to be given the right to vote (Nuñez Rey 166). Even more, around 1904, as I previously mentioned, she even translated what may be considered one of the most misogynist pseudo-scientific studies on the difference between the sexes: Paul J. Moebius’ *La inferioridad mental de la mujer*, originally published in German in 1900. In her prologue to this text, Burgos makes evident the need for critical analysis and public debate on such so-called objective, incontrovertible scientific “facts.” For example, Moebius cites specific dimensions of male and female brains, concluding that smaller female brains are evidence of women’s inferiority. As the translator, Burgos takes it upon herself to footnote various sections of Moebius’s text to provide the reader with her own refutations of the German neurologist’s hypotheses. For example, Moebius asserts that women are naturally inclined to dedicate their lives to children and family, and that “lo que es extraño a la familia no las interesa” (45). Immediately footnoted, Burgos directly refuses his statement with a equally generalized, quite non-scientific counterpoint: “Inexacto, pues fanatizadas, prefieren más que nada los intereses de la religión y del sacerdote a los del hogar, con un ahinco que se llama heroísmo entre hombres” (45). A few pages later, Burgos again alerts the reader to what she perceives as a great weakness in Moebius’s assertions: “Es preciso notar una gran confusión de términos e ideas en todo lo

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121 Nuñez Rey refers to an article published in the London *Daily Mail* in which César Lombroso “ha declarado lo peligroso de conceder el voto a la mujer española por ser ‘inculta y fanática’. Carmen niega tal aserto y defiende la existencia de una clase media ilustrada y suficientemente representativa” (166).  
122 Moebius’s *La inferioridad mental de la mujer* was originally published in German in 1900, and this German text arrived in Spain for the first time in 1900 by way of two installments in the *Revista de Ciencias Médicas de Barcelona* (Carrillo-Linares 102). Carrillo-Linares notes that, “lógicamente,” the diffusion of this German text in Spain was minimal until Burgos’s Spanish translation appeared approximately four years later (102). The exact date of this Spanish translation is a bit uncertain, as some critical studies cite an edition without a date (s.f. or n.d.) (Scanlon 165), or refer to dates ranging from 1903 (Mangini, *Las modernas* 102) to 1904 (Carrillo-Linares 102).
que toca a la psicología. No resiste el más ligero análisis” (48). Likewise, when Moebius suggests that women lack only the intellectual strength of men, but possess “todo cuanto le era necesario para el mejor desempeño de sus nobilísismas [sic] obligaciones” (57-58), Burgos adroitly destabilizes his entire project, suggesting that if this were true, “Entonces este libro debe llamarse, no la inferioridad, sino la diversidad de la mujer” (58). Her blatant refusal of his propositions and complete disavowal of the ideas she is translating is even more apparent when she simply notes after one of his statements, “Falso” (57). In this project, she clearly aims to take control of the discourse through her translation and editorial commentary, effectively undermining the text as she translates it. Even twenty-five years later, she continues to refer to Moebuis as “tan enemigo de la mujer” (La mujer moderna 64).

Clearly, Burgos is not afraid to approach scientific theories with a critical eye – the no less than fifteen provocative footnotes in her translation are a testimony to this tendency – and in doing so she urges her reading public to similarly challenge institutionally sanctioned or endorsed gender ideologies. This awareness of the way in which texts (literary, legal, medical or scientific) influence bodies and policy is an important facet of her feminism.

Critics who engage with Burgos’s final novel often cite Marañón’s aforementioned essays, Tres ensayos sobre la vida sexual and La evolución de la sexualidad y los estados sexuales, given that the doctor himself penned the prologue to Burgos’s narrative at her own request. In addition to her dedication, Burgos further makes clear his influence by using his very specific terminology throughout her narrative. Regarding Marañón’s three essays, the first in his Tres ensayos is entitled “Sexo, trabajo y deporte.” In it, the doctor states his thesis that [male] work is a function of sexual order; a true sexual characteristic (14-15), just as maternity and childrearing is for women (26-27). The third essay, “Educación sexual y diferenciación sexual,”
contains many of the concepts which Burgos brings to life in *Quiero vivir mi vida*, including semblances of his theory concerning intersexuality – that every man and woman carries within themselves the “fantasma […] del otro sexo” which healthy (“normal”) individuals are able to control and contain (172). In fact, in this essay, Marañón insists that “casi nadie es hombre en absoluto, ni mujer en absoluto […] Es siempre una mixtura de los caracteres somáticos y funcionales de los dos sexos, si bien con enorme predominio de uno sobre otro” (175). While Burgos no doubt found his theories on sexuality fascinating, especially given that she educated herself on the contemporary bio-political debates on women’s social roles and sexuality, it is clear that she disagreed with him on several fundamental points – especially, as we will see, his assertion that maternity was women’s biological destiny.

Marañón’s radical ideas regarding sexuality and the insufficiency of binary categorization of gender were indeed attractive to many feminists. In fact, despite the fact that modern historians tend to classify Marañón’s work as largely anti-feminist and even misogynist (Mangini, *Las modernas* 103-06, Scanlon 183-87), the endocrinologist also supported a number of feminist programs. Glick explains that Marañón was a pronatalist who fought hard for legislation to improve the health and hygiene of pregnant women, and to require employers to provide maternity leave (77-78). He emphasizes the fact that Marañón’s “influential” *Tres ensayos* were extremely popular with middle-class readers who perceived them as “an open attack on husbands in general and a plea on behalf of long-suffering wives” (Glick 77). Marañón was also an advocate of divorce, and he openly rejected Moebius’s proposition that women were inferior to men (Scanlon 183). Scanlon suggests that these characteristics, coupled with the fact that his writing lacked the obvious biases and prejudices of other authors like Weininger and González Blanco, made his arguments all the more persuasive, and at times appealing to some
feminists (183). Johnson is less judgmental in her assessment of Marañón’s “versatile” work, and alludes to some positive implications of his research inasmuch as his “ideas on sexuality raised public consciousness of gender ideology to new levels in the 1920s and 1930s” (Gender and Nation 186). With the benefit of hindsight, present-day scholars are understandably critical of the anti-feminist implications of Marañón’s theories. Nevertheless, it is important to consider more objectively some of the ways in which he succeeded, as Johnson and Glick suggest, in making his contemporary readership aware of gender ideology and the need for sexual reform. If we isolate some of his projects, we can even understand why a clearly feminist author like Carmen de Burgos would praise Marañón’s dedication to his research, and even commemorate him in her final novel.

The second and longest essay in Marañón’s Tres ensayos is titled “Maternidad y feminismo,” a fact that makes it the most relevant to the focus of the present literary analysis. Marañón was indeed an advocate of voluntary motherhood, or what he termed “maternidad consciente” (“Maternidad” 76). His thoughts on this issue do in fact align with much of Burgos’s feminist agenda, particularly in his assertion that women are not inferior, but rather different than men (“Sexo” 15-24), his concern for maternal and infant welfare (“Maternidad” 90-91), and his advocacy for improving women’s education so that they better understand the magnitude of their roles as mothers, should they choose to have children (85-86).

Burgos praised Marañón’s 123

123 Marañón expresses the following ideas in “Maternidad y feminismo,” and this sample of his work indeed illustrates that many of his principles cannot be interpreted as strictly anti-feminist, especially when compared to the likes of Moebius, Simmel, and other male intellectuals: “La maternidad que nosotros propugnamos ha de ser una maternidad consciente, con el máximo de garantías, dentro del azar que nos gobierna a todos, para que la madre no se convierta al poco tiempo en la víctima de la maternidad” (76-77); “La mujer no debe entregarse al marido, como ahora sucede, sin más garantía que el mutuo cariño – cuando existe –, pero sin ninguna defensa para su salud y la de sus hijos futuros. Ni nuestras leyes ni nuestra sociedad, ni la religión ponen cuidado en exigir la salud de los esposos, sobre todo, en aquellos enfermedades que se puedan transmitir” (94). Of further relevance is Glick’s article on sex reform and politics in Spain during the 1920s and 1930s, where he notes that Marañón did indeed support women’s suffrage and divorce (76). However Glick classifies Marañón as a social conservative throughout his article. He also contends that Marañón’s support for “a large portion of the feminist
willingness to publically share the negative effects of excessive maternity and childbirth based on his work in hospitals with women, infants and children. She even uses his research to support her feminist argument for controlled, conscious maternity and an end to the idealization of motherhood in *La mujer moderna y sus derechos*: “La excesiva natalidad no favorece ni al Estado ni a la familia. El doctor Marañón […] habla de las mujeres, madres de numerosos hijos, que, jóvenes aún, van a su clínica enfermas y deshechas por su excesiva fecundidad, y dice que ha comprobado que la mayor parte de los hijos de esas familias fecundas mueren en la infancia” (97). Additionally, Nuñez Rey reminds us that Burgos “conoce y acepta algunas teorías del propio Marañón, como su tesis sobre la escasa virilidad de Don Juan” (*Carmen de Burgos* 590).

This new characterization of the classic womanizer was actually accepted and shared by both male and female writers alike during the early twentieth century (Johnson, *Gender and Nation* 187-90). Burgos was undoubtedly a reader of her close friend Marañón’s publications and, as such, her respect for him has led some critics to assume she maintained faithful allegiance to his propositions while failing to see their feminist shortcomings. However, important divergences are evident upon more careful examinations of both the underlying tenets informing Marañón’s theses and the way in which Burgos chooses to dramatize these principles in her fiction.

First of all, one of the key features of *Quiero vivir mi vida* is its focus on the urgency of acknowledging and overturning biased and arbitrary double standards. Gender double agenda” distances his work – and some other scientific studies born of the complex sexual reform movement – from the “pseudoscientific antifeminism” identified by Geraldine Scanlon in her study of Spanish Feminism (75-76). Johnson summarizes: “Don Juan, earlier judged by some male writers [as] a symbol of masculine national energy, now assumes feminine characteristics” (*Gender and Nation* 187). For more extensive analyses, see Johnson’s third chapter in this text, “The Domestication of a Modernist Don Juan” (111-44).

According to Roberta Johnson, “Isabel gives herself the rights that the social and legal systems have denied her,” by having her own extra-marital affair and by ultimately killing her husband (*Gender and Nation* 209-10). In her close-reading, Establier Pérez classifies *Quiero vivir mi vida’s* Isabel as one of Burgos’s “degeneradas,” attributing her erratic behavior to an enactment of male qualities which were typically accepted by society, but should be condemned and ultimately unacceptable (131-35). Starcevic believes that Isabel’s frustration with her
standards were everywhere in Spanish society at this time – in religion, legal discourse, science and even medicine. In fact, Johnson suggests that by the 1920s and 1930s, “scientific, biologically centered discourse dominated public conversations about gender” (*Gender and Nation* 185). Mary Nash has suggested that this type of “biological essentialism” was even more powerful than religion in exerting control over “the construction of gender difference and the modernization of the notion of femininity in early twentieth-century Spain, and, thus, a key feature in the development of women’s shared cultural identity and their collective definition of identity politics and a woman’s agenda” (“Un/Contested Identities” 25-26). For her part, in *La mujer moderna y sus derechos*, Burgos takes on not only these numerous injustices inscribed in the Spanish legal codes, but also those prevalent in social customs, and even science and medicine. For example, Burgos critiques the way in which women’s sexuality is censured and associated with dishonor, while men are left “en completa libertad … Es como si existiese un pecado exclusivamente femenino” (91). She also points to the fact that adultery was similarly considered a female crime; husbands were not punished (provided they did not incite a public scandal), whereas wives and their lovers were indeed castigated: “El adulterio lo cometen únicamente la mujer y su cómplice, pero éste sólo si sabe que es casada … Un marido no incurre jamás en penalidad” (188). She also passionately criticizes the infamous “Artículo 438,” which stipulated a distinct, less severe, punishment unequal access all those things available to men is at the heart of her crisis, not any inclination towards homosexuality, or intersexuality (132-24). Amy J. Bell has written an informative article on psychoneuroses in this text, proposing that Isabel can also be “construed as a manifestation of Burgos’s latent dissatisfaction with the prototypical heroines found in male-authored novels of Restoration Spain” (271). Mangini has closely examined this text, concluding that Burgos “turns patriarchal discourse on its head” and reveals that patriarchal theories (like Marañón’s) epitomize the “the ‘gothic villain’ who is appropriating and controlling the female body and mind, and making women the victims of its insidious campaign” (“The Female” 30). See Mangini’s article for an extensive account of other critical studies on this text (31n).

126 Additional social customs based on double standards which are the object of Burgos’s critique include the practice of marrying a young woman to an elderly man, the dishonor associated with single motherhood, and the lack of concern for paternity investigations (*La mujer moderna* 91-94).
for uxoricide (wife-murder) in the case of adultery, as opposed to more general instances of homicide.\textsuperscript{127} Identifying the use of scientific and medical discourse to maintain such double standards, Burgos states clearly that men of science had argued “arbitrariamente” in order to prove their supposed superiority and limit women’s advancement; she suggests that women might just as arbitrarily make counter arguments to prove their superiority (77).\textsuperscript{128} In \textit{Quiero vivir mi vida}, Burgos focuses on and challenges one area within the scientific and medical domains in which double standards were most prevalent (and potentially most damaging), yet paradoxically most accepted as “natural” within the binary classification of gender roles – reproduction.

In her first challenge to Marañón’s theories and to anti-feminist discourse in general, Burgos aims to question, and even dispel, the myth that all women possess an innate maternal instinct. For Marañón, and many other men of science like him, a woman’s biological destiny and principal social function is, and should be, that of maternity:

\begin{quote}
Para nosotros es indudable que la mujer debe ser madre ante todo, con olvido de todo lo demás si fuera preciso; y ellas, por inexcusable obligación de su sexo; como el hombre debe aplicar su energía al trabajo creador por la misma
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{127} Although instances of uxoricide were indeed rare in Spain at this time, Burgos found it infuriating that such a provision was allowed to exist in modern policy. She cites this “vergonzoso artículo 438” in her essay: “El marido que, sorprendiendo en adulterio a su mujer, matare en el acto a ésta o al adúltero o les causare alguna de las lesiones grave, será castigado con pena de destierro. Si les causare lesiones de otra clase quedará exento de pena” (\textit{La mujer moderna} 189-90). Furthermore, in 1921, Burgos penned a short novella entitled “Artículo 438” as a way of demonstrating the way in which the legal system all but condoned misogynous behavior within marriage through its antiquated codes and refusal to allow divorce (See Anja Louis for a careful analysis of this text in light of the contemporary Spanish legal codes).

\textsuperscript{128} Burgos refers to studies by Moebius, Marañón and Weininger, then affirms the following: “Nada significa, desde el punto de vista de la superioridad, las diferencias que la mujer tenga más alto el talle y más cortos los miembros inferiores … Para argumentar arbitrariamente como los hombres lo han hecho, la mujer podría invocar en estas diferencias signos de superioridad; como son tener los brazos más cortos, el maxilar inferior más pequeño, bien conformado y suelto, carencia, en muchos casos de la \textit{muela del juicio} … La laringe de la mujer es más pequeña, apenas se le conoce la \textit{manzana de Adán}, su glotis, estrecha, hace su voz más agudo, más alta cuando canta, más emocionante cuando grita y más persuasiva y penetrante cuando habla” (\textit{La mujer moderna} 77).
ley inexcusable de su sexualidad varonil. Oigamos otra vez la voz de Dios, insistente y eterna: “Tú, mujer, parirás; tú, hombre, trabajarás. (Marañón, “Maternidad” 73) ¹²⁹

Perhaps the most notable aspect of Marañón’s discourse is the fact that, despite his position as a medical doctor, he nevertheless invokes traditional biblical concepts, thus relying on unstable religious assumptions in order to justify his position. For example, Marañón evokes Adam and Eve, and the creation myth in the book of Genesis (“Sexo” 29-30). He refers to Mary as “el símbolo de un ser excelso y limpio de pecado… a la que todos los seres humanos habían de rendir un culto fervoroso” (“Maternidad” 66); he evokes “la voz de Dios” (73); and he speaks of maternity as a “mandato de Dios” (76). Julia Kristeva has identified this feminist problem within developed western societies as well: “Christianity is doubtless the most refined symbolic construct in which femininity, to the extent that it transpires through it – and does so incessantly – is focused on Maternity” (Tales of Love 234). Like many Spanish liberals of the nineteenth century who touted a secular agenda of reform (like Republicans opposed to the monarchy, and the Krausists’ challenge to church control of education, for example), Burgos and other liberal first-wave feminists of the twentieth century were similarly skeptical of the incorporation of religious doctrine into politics. They aimed to challenge the control that Catholicism in particular wielded in the realms of Spanish legal and political authority (Ugarte, “Carmen de Burgos” 63). Thus, while scientists and doctors labored to establish incontrovertible facts that would equate women with the mother role, feminists like Burgos labored to prove the often arbitrary, subjective nature of this research.

¹²⁹ Moebius similary professed that women were destined to be mothers: “La mujer está destinada a ser madre; luego todo lo que tienda a entorpecer este deber es falso y dañoso” (La inferioridad 89). Georg Simmel shared a similar viewpoint in his essay “Lo masculino y lo femenino” (1923) stating that maternity was the “absolute” for women (Filosofía).
Much like Simone de Beauvoir would argue decades later, Burgos’s final narrative demonstrates that the so-called maternal instinct is not necessarily a universal character trait of all women – and certainly not of her protagonist, Isabel. In Isabel’s case, not only does she lack a maternal instinct, but she views the process of reproduction and mothering with repulsion. And likewise, she makes no apologies for this sentiment. She fiercely states her desire to remain childless: “Pues yo no deseo tener hijos –declaró con violencia—. Fisiológicamente la maternidad me parece una porquería. Se engaña a las pobres mujeres cantando alabanzas a la madre, para que no se nieguen a dar a luz y no falten ángeles para el cielo y soldados para la guerra” (33). Isabel’s rejection of maternity only intensifies upon contemplating her sister, Rosa, after giving birth to her first child. She refers to Rosa as “deformada, enferma, sufriendo; tan cambiada, que no le parecía la misma” (29). As de Beauvoir controversially stated in *The Second Sex*: “No maternal ‘instinct’ exists: the word hardly applies, in any case, to the human species. The mother’s attitude depends on her total situation and her reaction to it [...] and this is highly variable” (511). Burgos clearly understood this sentiment in 1931, as her protagonist expresses her fear and anguish at even the thought of experiencing a potential pregnancy: “Sentía Isabel verdadero pánico de que una traición de la naturaleza la pusiera, contra su voluntad, en ese trance. [...] Sentía angustia de verse expuesta a una forzosa maternidad. En el fondo de su ser había una protesta contra el predominio femenino de su morfología. Vagamente formulaba en su interior una aspiración suprema: ¡Si yo fuese hombre!” (29-30, emphasis mine). Interestingly, both the distressed tone and the harsh language which are latent in the presentation of pregnancy

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130 Specifically, de Beauvoir points to two common preconceptions regarding maternity, which she believes are in fact false. The first of these false preconceptions – or misconceptions – is the idea that “maternity is enough in all cases to crown a woman’s life. It is nothing of the kind” (520). De Beauvoir equates this type of proselytizing, and the values associated with it, to an advertising slogan (523). Secondly, she argues that the common preconception that a child will undoubtedly be happy in its mother’s arms is also a myth: “There is no such thing as an ‘unnatural mother,’ to be sure, since there is nothing natural about maternal love; but precisely for that reason, there are bad mothers” (523).
and maternity in this novel, also echo Burgos’s narration of the same topic in *La rampa* (particularly as she demystified the charitable maternal experience in the Casa de Maternidad). In *Quiero vivir mi vida*, however, rather than critique institutional attitudes towards mothers, Burgos aims to forcefully demonstrate – and legitimize – the way in which her protagonist is in no way drawn to the mother role by any natural, or biological, maternal instinct.

Even more revelatory is the fact that Burgos based important elements of the fictional doctor, Alfredo, on Marañón’s real-life person,\(^\text{131}\) yet allows this character to admit that an innate maternal instinct is questionable. Analogous to Marañón’s essays, Alfredo’s reasoning is suspect for its speculative nature: “pero si las mujeres fuesen francas, muchas confesarian esa falta de instinto materno; unas porque guardan una energía viriloide que se opone a él; otras porque su voluptuosidad, manifiesta o latente, ve un estorbo en el hijo” (50). By creating a character who appears to be a spokesperson of Marañónian theory, and then ensuring that he rejects key features of such theories, Burgos further challenges the veracity of this research. Isabel’s own husband worriedly seeks medical advice from Alfredo (who is also Julio’s closest friend), believing that something is medically wrong with his wife: “Isabel carece en absoluto de instinto materno. Sería capaz de divorciarse si le hablase de tener hijos. […] Isabel huye de la maternidad, que tanto seduce a las demás mujeres” (50).\(^\text{132}\) It must not be overlooked that Julio and Alfredo speak of women in terms that echo Marañón, implying that a lack of maternal instinct must be an abnormality. Correspondingly, the Spanish doctor states in his essays that “[el] instinto de la maternidad y cuidado directo de la prole [es] innato en la hembra normal”

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\(^\text{131}\) In her edition of the novel, Susan Larson footnotes the first appearance of Alfredo, suggesting that “muchas de las ideas del personaje Alfredo reflejan en momentos claves de la novela algunos elementos del pensamiento científico de Gregorio Marañón (*Quiero vivir mi vida* 47).

\(^\text{132}\) Julio’s brother-in-law (Rosa’s husband) also aids in reinforcing this patriarchal point of view, explaining to Isabel after the birth of his own son that “Precisamente vuestra importancia en el mundo es la maternidad. Por eso tenéis que atrincheraros en ella como un una fortaleza” (33). Isabel is furious when her own husband agrees, and steadfastly insists that she has no desire for children.
(“Maternidad” 29, emphasis mine). Foucault has drawn attention to the way in which modern medical discourse is more concerned with “normality” than with “health,” though he does not elaborate the important implications of gendered ideology in the construction of so-called normal standards (*The Birth of the Clinic*).\(^{133}\) Foucault’s analysis brings to light the way in which medical opinion is exactly that – opinion based on one’s subjective interpretation of observable phenomena in an individual: “Medical rationality plunges into the marvelous density of perception, offering the grain of things as the first face of truth … The breadth of the experiment seems to be identified with the domain of the careful gaze, and of an empirical vigilance receptive only to the evidence of visible contents” (*The Birth of the Clinic* xiii). The casting of the individual (and/or the individual’s body), as the object of the medical gaze (rather than series or groups), is a crucial distinction made in Foucault’s work, as it allows for the diagnosis of pathology (15).\(^{134}\)

In *Quiero vivir mi vida*, according to the opinions of the *male* characters in this text, for example, Isabel’s behavior is unnatural and abnormal; therefore any marital discontent or

\(^{133}\) Foucault discusses the gradual transformation of medical discourse which led to the confusion of the concepts of “health” and “normalcy”: “Generally speaking, it might be said that up to the end of the eighteenth century medicine related much more to health than to normality; it did not begin by analyzing a ‘regular’ functioning of the organism and go on to seek where it had deviated […] it referred, rather, to qualities of vigour, suppleness, and fluidity, which were lost in illness and which it was the task of medicine to restore. […] This privileged relation between medicine and health involved the possibility of being one’s own physician. Nineteenth century medicine, on the other hand, was regulated more in accordance with normality than with health; it formed its concepts and prescribed its interventions in relation to a standard of functioning and organic structure” (*The Birth of the Clinic* 35). When accounting for gender differences, the concept of “normal” can be entirely subjective, particularly as we have seen with early twentieth century scientists, doctors and neurologists who maintained firm allegiance to anti-feminist beliefs in women’s inferiority (see Mangini 97-112 and Scanlon 159-94). In fact, regarding the increasing involvement of the “hospital” in matters of women’s health after the eighteenth century, Versluysen suggests that “it is necessary to ask why this new type of institutional care was thought appropriate for healthy young parturient women, who, even if debilitated by poverty, were not presenting any pathology but had reached the usual outcome of pregnancy, i.e. childbirth” (20).

\(^{134}\) “Medical perception must be directed neither to series nor to groups […] thus initiating the endless task of understanding the individual […] Doctor and patient are caught up in an ever-greater proximity, bound together, the doctor by and ever-more attentive, more insistent, more penetrating gaze, the patient by all the silent, irreplaceable qualities that, in him, betray—that is, reveal and conceal—the clearly ordered forms of the disease” (Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* 15). Foucault goes on to explain that, “before the advent of civilization, people had only the simplest, most necessary diseases … none of those variable, complex, intermingled nervous ills, but down-to-earth apoplexies, or uncomplicated attacks of mania (16).
nervous episodes she experiences must be the result of her refusal to fulfill her “natural” maternal function. Interestingly, and problematically, Alfredo places this “illness” in the same context as that of addicts: “Hay enfermedades que enamoran al que las padece y no quieren verse libres de ellas. Es lo que les sucede a los que usan estupefacientes, desde el café y el alcohol hasta la heroína; y a las que desean vivir su vida, a toda costa” (88). Two very important details arise from Alfredo’s use of the phrase which titles the novel. First, his use of “las” (not “los,” which he uses to refer to drug addicts) emphasizes that this particular enfermedad is peculiar to women. Secondly, he believes that women do not want to be free of this apparent affliction – this desire to vivir su vida – a revealing choice of words which speaks to the extent to which he is oblivious to the way in which gender informs his diagnoses. If, as he states, “es un mal que padecen el noventa y cinco por ciento de los nacidos” (88), then we must question his judgment, and the motives behind his insistence, that Isabel is sick with an “abnormal” condition. Again, Burgos implores her readers to critically analyze modern medical or scientific theories claiming to disseminate pure facts.

One very specific aspiration is crucial to Isabel’s rejection of maternity: her vocal wish that she were a man, rather than a woman who would be faced with the inevitable female fate of motherhood. Isabel repeatedly expresses this desire throughout the novel, especially when faced with questions regarding her marriage and subsequent rejection of motherhood. While we have seen how Burgos places her protagonist’s desire within Marañón’s scientific paradigm of “intersexualidad,” she cleverly discredits aspects of these propositions by revealing the arbitrary nature behind his scientific attempts to establish a precise and conclusive woman-mother link. Alfredo explains to Julio that his wife’s nervous state is likely due to her rejection of

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135 Variations of “¡Si fuese hombre!,” “Quiero ser hombre,” “¡Qué asco/desgracia ser mujer!” appear consistently throughout the novel.
motherhood: “Para eso le haría falta el hijo… Muchas mujeres son como instrumentos desafinados hasta que lo tienen” (50). Furthermore, Alfredo diagnoses Isabel’s enfermedad with Marañón’s descriptive, (pseudo)scientific terminology, affirming that her condition must be provoked by her possession of “demasiados elementos viriloides” (100). Yet at the same time, he is shown to be extremely attracted to Isabel’s feminine traits: particularly, her beauty and mastery of feminine coquetería. Ironically, he is unable to continue treating her due to this uncomfortable attraction, and his diagnosis thus proves to be entirely subjective and rather capricious. In this instance, Isabel disarms his methodical attempts to quell her restless and uncertain spirit. Marañón similarly viewed this “feminine” trait as one of women’s greatest assets and sources of power (“Maternidad” 157). If we consider how Burgos fought to overturn double-standards and place women on equal legal grounds with men in La mujer moderna y sus derechos, Isabel’s desire to “be a man” may be interpreted less literally and more abstractly as representative of her desire for increased legal rights and social privileges which accompanied the masculine gender in Spanish society.

This hypothesis is further corroborated upon considering Isabel’s extramarital affair with a young boy while on a lengthy summer vacation in a small beach town. Upon returning to her husband, she declares that she will practice “el honor a lo hombre” and hide her affair from Julio: “Volvía al lado de su marido con esa tranquilidad con que vuelven los hombres al lado de sus esposas después de una infidelidad a la que no conceden importancia” (162). From her declarations, it is clear that Isabel feels women are subjected to a hypocritical moral code which affords numerous liberties to men, while condemning similar behavior in women. In fact, later in the text we will see how these double-standards unravel both the plot of the novel and the theory

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136 Marañón explains: “Pero no olvidemos que por encima de todas las aspiraciones del feminismo quedará siempre en manos de la mujer el más legítimo de sus resortes de dominación, el encanto sexual, con el que no se gobierna el mundo, pero sí a los hombres” (“Maternidad” 157).
of intersexuality upon which it is based. Returning to the issue of reproduction, however, Isabel also aims to occupy the other side of the double-standard within both the public and private spheres. She rejects the role of the *perfecta casada* typically assigned to women, and even advocated by Marañón in his essay “Maternidad” (106-08). By doing so, she attempts to free herself of the social pressures and limitations associated with both her biological categorization as “female” and her social categorization as “woman,” which too often became conflated with “mother.”

Isabel and her sister Rosa are shown to be complete opposites when it comes to their estimation of motherhood, yet neither one is portrayed as immune to social complications posed by their relationship to maternity. Allen’s concept of the “maternal dilemma” is useful here, as she articulates the complications which arise when women choose to either reject, or accept motherhood, believing that their only way of affirming a personal identity is to dedicate their lives to either family, or perhaps to ‘frivolous,’ individual activities, but not to both. Rosa proves to have absorbed the ideology which establishes a natural, biological connection between women and motherhood: “Rosita, satisfecha de su estado, confesaba que ella había nacido para madre. Sus entrañas se habían abierto al instinto materno como las rosas de Jérico, que […] se despliegan fatalmente para cumplir, sin conciencia, la misión impuesta por las leyes físicas” (34). Burgos’s melodramatic depiction of Rosa’s fascination and satisfaction with her maternity further supports a critique of such reductionist estimations of women as mothers.

Yet despite Rosa’s naïve satisfaction, the narrator informs the reader that “La pasión del hijo traía las primeras nubes al matrimonio, que hasta entonces había marchado siempre de acuerdo” (91). Furthermore, upon marrying and becoming a mother, for example, Rosa
dedicates her life to her child and husband to the detriment of her own individual needs, explaining to Isabel: “Yo no soy mujer de sociedad como tú. No estoy al tanto de ciertas elegancias. Tengo siempre cosas más graves en que pensar. ¡Cuando se tienen hijos!” (40).
Perhaps Burgos drew from her own sentiments when she demonstrates the manner in which the importance Rosa places on her role as mother irritates her sister. Isabel frequently attempts to hide “el mohín de impaciencia que le producía la condición materna que su hermana invocaba constantemente” (40). She even begins to avoid spending time with her sister and nephew, complaining, that, “Es insorportable. Siempre con el niño a cuestas. Me deja olor a nodriza en el auto” (53).
In La mujer moderna y sus derechos, Burgos criticizes this excessive value and emphasis placed on motherhood and maternity in a woman’s life:

Se invoca la maternidad como uno de los motivos que deben retenerla en el hogar apartada de toda otra actividad, como si el papel exclusivo de la mujer fuese el de madre y esposa. Hay muchas mujeres que no se casan, otras que no son madres, y otras que, cumplida su misión, respecto a los hijos, tiene tiempo a dedicarse a otras cosas. Está demostrado cuando vemos a las madres dejar a los hijos para irse de paseo, de compras, de bailes, teatros, etc. Si los dejan por esas frivolidades, ¿por qué no pueden dejarlos para atender ocupaciones serias? (219)

Here again Burgos shows herself to be in complete opposition to Marañón. In fact, the latter, from his position as a medical authority, advocated and entirely antithetical viewpoint:

“Prácticamente […] una buena madre durante los años de la fecundidad, que son los centrales de su vida, no podrá ser ni deberá ser otra cosa que madre. En este punto, pues, yo no estoy conforme con la mayoría de las feministas” (“Maternidad” 117).
Rosa, then, represents one maternal extreme: that of the passive, submissive and
dedicated wife and mother. However, in *Quiero vivir mi vida*, Burgos reveals another
extreme position. Married women like Isabel, women who do voluntary choose to remain
childless, find it difficult to affirm an appropriate identity for themselves which is not
dependent on their maternity. Because Isabel sees no models of womanhood, or wifehood,
that do not also include maternity, she experiences a sense of powerlessness which leads her
to behave in an erratic and disturbing fashion. Julia Kristeva can again shed light on the
feminist implications of Isabel’s struggle to define a stable identity independent of the
expected *perfecta casada* – a role this protagonist never felt comfortable with.\(^{137}\) As Kristeva
explains in her 1976 essay “Stabat Mater,” “we live in a civilization where the *consecrated*
(religious or secular) representation of femininity is absorbed by motherhood. If, however,
one looks at it more closely, this motherhood is the *fantasy* that is nurtured by the adult, man
or woman, of a lost territory” (234).\(^{138}\) Of further relevance, the Kristevean critique notes that
in these representations, especially that of the Virgin mother, “humanity… is not always
obvious” (235). Indeed femininity in early twentieth century Spain was closely associated
with, and even dependent on, these “consecrated representations” of maternity: the Virgin

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\(^{137}\) Even immediately after her wedding, Isabel felt as if she were merely playing a role, “jugando a a la dueña
de casa” in an attempt to conform to the traditional family structure: “Tomaba su papel en el hogar con el
mismo temor que experimentaría la actriz que hace de reina si se persuadieses de que no se podría quitar jamás
el manto y la corona” (28).

\(^{138}\) Kristeva explains that this “lost territory” is not a specific idealized mother or place, but rather that
“idealization of the *relationship* that binds us to her [the mother], one that cannot be localized – and idealization
of primary narcissism. Now, when feminism demands a new representation of femininity, it seems to identify
motherhood with that idealized misconception and, because it rejects the image and its misuse, feminism
circumvents the real experience that fantasy overshadows. The result? – a negation or rejection of motherhood
by some avant-garde feminist groups” (234). We must remember that Kristeva is writing several generations
after Burgos, and in a much different cultural context. Yet she identifies a key point which indeed characterizes
the majority of western European feminism(s): the rejection of motherhood. As this chapter, and my
dissertation, contends, First-Wave Spanish feminists like Burgos (and Nelken and Montseny) did *not* subscribe
to this avant-garde brand of feminism which was inclined to reject motherhood outright. Rather, they sought to
redfine the terms of this role, particularly by removing the idea that motherhood was an obligatory, necessary
part of Spanish womanhood.
Mary, in Catholic discourse; the *ángel del hogar* and *perfecta casada* in more secular representations (though still infused with religious connotations). Medical professionals like Marañón, as well as the greater scientific community (like Moebius, earlier) worked to uphold maternity as an essential, feminine trait and traditional value: “*La maternidad*, aunque en el tiempo sea un episodio en la mujer, es *lo consubstancial con el concepto de la feminidad*” (Marañón, “Maternidad” 118, my emphasis).\(^{139}\)

But for Burgos, motherhood must be a choice, not an essential prerequisite for womanhood or femininity. Her willingness to draw attention to, and criticize, the cult of motherhood demonstrates her awareness of the way in which idyllic depictions of the maternal experience are indeed fantasies – constructs created as a means of enticing women towards this domestic role. These constructs were based on no reality that Burgos had ever known; she herself lost three of her four children to illness, and her biography demonstrates that her brief experience as the *ángel del hogar* in her Almerian village was anything but perfect (Nuñez Rey 69-72). In both her novels and essay, Burgos draws attention to the fact that the mother-role in early 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century Spain was rapidly transforming. This traditional maternal role could no longer represent a secure and idyllic future of domestic bliss. On the contrary, it became increasingly dependent on a variety of (often uncontrollable) external conditions, including social surroundings, economic situations, women’s education, social class, and especially a woman’s own decision regarding marriage.\(^{140}\)

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\(^{139}\) Marañón elaborates his view of the intimate connection between maternity and femininity: “La madre debe ser madre por encima de todo; y *la maternidad*, ya lo sabemos […] *supone el máximo desarrollo de la esencia misma de la feminidad*” (“Maternidad” 145, my emphasis).

\(^{140}\) As a result of this kaleidoscopic modern socio-cultural landscape, many male writers at the turn of the century tended to exhibit a “historical impulse” or an “obsession with the past” as a way of coping with the devastation provoked by the transformation and erosion of traditional beliefs and customs (Johnson, *Gender and Nation* 3). However Allen emphasizes that most “feminists did not share this foreboding” and, quite contrarily, many women “rejoiced that they lived in an era when even such a formidable institution as patriarchy was open to questions” (3, 25).
Returning to *Quiero vivir mi vida*, while Isabel suffers dramatically as a result of these social pressures, many secondary female characters also express similar sentiments. Much like the protagonist, her female acquaintances discuss their own identity struggles, noting the insufficiencies not merely of standard depictions of womanhood, but also of the unreasonable (often undesirable) socio-cultural expectations which accompany them. For many of these women, the only female images they have encountered are connected to marriage and motherhood, yet curiously in this modern social landscape, only a few of the secondary female characters are mothers – and only two from Isabel’s generation. Isabel, for instance, is a married bourgeois woman who does not work and who does not desire children, thus she struggles to find something meaningful with which to occupy her time. Her consistent rejection of maternity eliminates both the principal outlet through which married bourgeois women are encouraged to define themselves, and the primary social identity to which they are instructed to aspire. To compensate, she begins to obsess over her appearance, her material possessions, and her friendships. Importantly, Isabel’s friends share her dissatisfaction, and they similarly behave in ways which male characters deem erratic and

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141 Mothers in the text include Isabel’s sister Rosa and their mother Doña Milagros; Matilde, who is also close in age to Isabel and Rosa, gives birth to Julio’s child at the end of the novel; and Bernice, an older woman Isabel meets while on her beach vacation, who reportedly gave birth to nearly twelve children, yet proudly declares: “Yo soy una mujer honrada porque jamás he tornado un centime de un hombre. Al contrario. […] He criado a todos mis hijos, tanto los que tuve de soltera como los que nacieron estando casada o después viuda. He sido muy buena madre y de nada me remuerde la conciencia” (124). Despite her confidence and the fact that Isabel understands this woman’s conception of a unique form of honor, Isabel’s mother laughs, “escandalizada” by such non-traditional philosophy. Secondary characters who are not mothers in the text include Berta (who is widowed and apparently older than Isabel, though her exact age is unclear), Joaquina, Lina, and Manuela – all friends or acquaintances close in age to Isabel.

142 Isabel begins to worry about her looks: “El deseo de protección hacia la ancianidad venía a suplir el instinto materno, no sólo nulo en ella, sino hasta repulsivo” (29). When Julio gives her a car (“un Packard elegante” 57), she spends her time driving, noting that driving is an escape from the home. Furthermore, the narrator’s description of her love for the car parallels the discourse employed elsewhere in the novel to describe excessive maternal love for a child: “No sabía hablar más que de su auto; de la marcha en primera o en tercera; del motor; de las bielas. Fundaba su orgullo en la belleza de su coche” (30). And while she is childless, Isabel does indeed have a small dog, “un lulú,” *Kees* that accompanies her on her drives “como otro adorno del auto” (62). The narrator explains that for Isabel, “no distinguía mucho entre el cariño de *Kees* y el de Julio [su sobrino]” (62).
abnormal. Joaquina is unhappy in her marriage, and maintains various extramarital affairs while her husband is away from Madrid. Lina has married a man more than twice her age and only remains content when she leaves him for several days: “se entregaba al arte, se encerraba en su taller de soltera, que conservaba” (113). Finally, Manuela (a mere acquaintance) is enraged by the way in which many married women with whom she associates blindly adhere to Catholic values and biblical lore. Manuela goes as far as to label the Bible a “libro inmoral,” full of “atrocidades” (64). Even more telling, however, is the fact that these are the same women who actually share and understand Isabel’s repeated complaints that being a woman is a misfortune; and that being a man is preferable. Joaquina agrees with Isabel when she declares, “Yo no quisiera ser mujer” (70); Isabel declares that Lina is the only friend who truly understands her; and Manuela herself exclaims, “¡Qué desgracia ser mujer!” (64).

Given that the main protagonist, and several other female characters, feel confined, restricted, and out of place in the society in which they live, it is useful to evaluate Burgos’s narrative in light of the characteristics attributed to the female double, a literary trope which Gilbert and Gubar have identified within nineteenth century women’s novel. These feminist scholars discovered that a “double” is often present in novels with female protagonists who feel that they are “both literally and figuratively confined” (xi). Repeated images in these novels often include “enclosure and escape, fantasies in which maddened doubles functioned as asocial surrogates for docile selves, metaphors of physical discomfort […] and obsessive depictions of diseases” (xi). Gilbert and Gubar posit that the frequent appearance of the double within women’s literature owes to the fact that, “it is debilitating to be any woman in a society where woman are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be
monsters (53). Furthermore, the feminist critics explain that both gothic and anti-gothic writers represented themselves as split selves, creating a sort of “female schizophrenia of authorship” which can actually function as the author’s double, or the “image of her own anxiety and rage” (78). But the interpretation of *Quiero vivir mi vida* can be broadened if we consider the frequent use and manipulation of “parodic gothic elements” which Mangini has identified (“The Female” 30), together with the fact that Burgos herself acknowledged including autobiographical details in this text (Utrera 457-60). First, Burgos proves that these two diametrically opposing viewpoints regarding marriage and motherhood are insufficient through the characterization of Isabel and Rosa. Secondly, she demonstrates the intense feelings of psychological distress which this difficult negotiation causes through the appropriation of Marañón’s theory – a modern, medical concept which provides an innovative blueprint for the female “double” motif identified in Gilbert and Gubar’s *Madwoman in the Attic*.

In this sense, Isabel’s feelings of literal and metaphorical confinement are dramatized on a new, psychological level which recent theories in early twentieth century scientific and medical research had made possible. Thus while Isabel, Rosa, or even Berta (Rosa’s sister-in-law), may be interpreted as potential doubles of the author, Burgos most effectively illustrates the concept within her singular protagonist. That is, Isabel experiences a sense of irritating confinement in her own female body and consciousness. The protagonist herself explains her frustrations: “Me parece que tengo dos cerebros superpuestos” (168). While patriarchal figures (her husband, doctor, and even priest, as we will see) aim to diagnose her dissatisfaction as an indication of abnormality stemming from her refusal, or denial, of the

143 Bell has suggested that Isabel is indeed a manifestation of Burgos’s own literary “double” in which the author expresses “her own frustration at common social and literary patriarchal structures regarding women” (283).
responsibilities ascribed to women in Spanish society, Isabel views her “problem” in a much different light. She considers the entire structure of this gendered social system to be insufficient: “Tenía la desgracia de no tener bastante frivolidad femenina para ser feliz con las futesas que les bastaban a las otras mujeres, ni poseer suficiente fortaleza viril para aspirar a un plano espiritual superior. Aquella era su lucha y su martirio” (168). There is no middle ground in this world. Though Isabel’s erratic behavior shifts constantly between two extremes, it really only puzzles her husband and male doctor. Her female friends, as we have seen, do not subscribe to such patriarchal diagnoses that posit a mysterious or disturbing force as the driving force behind Isabel’s behavior.

Science and medicine were not the only realms in which powerful, educated individuals aimed to use their influence for the sake of establishing, promoting, and maintaining a woman-mother link. The practice of affixing women to maternity served to reinforce traditional patriarchal family structures which kept mothers in the home. Religion, and Spanish Catholicism in particular, also sought to portray motherhood as a duty women were obliged to perform in marriage. Despite the fact that she did not identify with any particular religion – and especially not Catholicism – Burgos is careful not to overtly attack the Church, its teachings or its followers.144 Rather, she aspired to more objectively lay bare the components and ideology informing religious doctrine in such a way that readers are

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144 Regarding Burgos’s religious affiliation, or lack thereof, Ballarín Domingo has described the author as “pantéista” (18), explaining that her free lifestyle largely owed to the fact that she “vivió sin Dios” (41). Mangini similar notes that “[l]a libertad que sentía Carmen también es producto de su rechazo de la opresiva Iglesia Católica y de las injustas leyes españolas… Raras veces expresó su hostilidad ante la Iglesia y el Estado en su obra de ficción, pero a veces aquélla se hacía evidente en sus ensayos sobre la necesidad de la educación secular” (Las modernas 71). Finally, Ugarte astutely concludes that, “although Burgos does not side with conservative Catholic feminism, she never posits herself as anticlerical … [and] she takes great care to distance herself from the popular anticlerical discourse that was crucial to the understanding of the history of the Spanish Left. (“Carmen de Burgos” 63).
invited to think critically about the role of religion in the construction of their social world. 

This is an important nuance of Burgos’s style of socio-cultural commentary, as her critique was often subtle yet scathing, despite the fact that she maintained immense respect for mothers and motherhood, much like conservative (largely Catholic) feminist organizations. In *Quiero vivir mi vida*, religion and the Catholic Church prove to be one of the most damaging influences on Isabel’s psyche (especially in the latter portion of the novel, as Bell has rightly observed (277). First, Isabel’s mother attempts to foster the notion that motherhood is a woman’s marital duty in her own daughters, revealing the extent to which her own generation had absorbed the teachings of the church. She explains to her daughter that she must have children “para hacer la voluntad del Altísimo,” further declaring that “los matrimonios sin hijos no me parecen benditos de Dios” (32). Here, early in the novel, readers observe how religion played a major role in causing women to be complicit in the continuation of their subordinate social position.

A second way in which religion served to quell feminist aspirations is through the power wielded by the confessor. In *Quiero vivir mi vida*, when Isabel seeks out advice from the priest during her short stint as a church-going *religiosa*, he gives her extremely questionable advice, from a feminist perspective, regarding her role as a dutiful wife to

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145 Burgos does this intelligently in Chapter X of *La mujer moderna*: “El derecho y la religión” (229-243). For example, she opens the chapter with the statement: “La concepción de la Teogonía de los pueblos ejerce gran influencia en la suerte de la mujer” (229). She refers to various world religions before concentrating on Cristianity, specifically contemporary interpretations and misunderstanding of “la doctrina de Jesús,” which she admits “[e]n potencia… contiene el feminismo” (230).

146 Interestingly, in 1931, Margarita Nelken pointed to Spanish women’s interactions with their confessors as having detrimental effects on these women’s understanding of the progressive feminist movement and of their own rights. She implicates the confessor in the suffrage debate, noting his influence by expressing her fear that women would vote as their confessors advised them, thus reinforcing the power of the conservative Catholic church (*La mujer ante las cortes constituyentes* 21).
When she confesses the insecurities and doubts behind her marital relationship, he only attempts to coax her toward the role from which she is fleeing. He explains: “Tiene usted un marido y una obligación en el mundo, hija mía. Piense en la Epístola de San Pablo. Su cuerpo no le pertenece. Tiene usted que cumplir los fines del estado que eligió” (185). Her confessor even goes so far as to suggest that Isabel’s failure to satisfy her husband’s sexual needs and his desire for children would thus render her culpable if her husband were to be unfaithful or even have an illegitimate child with another woman: “Es usted la responsable de los actos que por causa de su esquivez o su falta de celo cometa su esposo” (185). The direct, patronizing tone which the priest employs with Isabel further serves to undermine the faith placed in religion and religiously informed representations of gender roles and the family. This is further proven when Julio forbids Isabel from returning to confession, fearing that she will soon suspect his own infidelities. Bell categorizes this scene as one of the most disturbing, from a feminist perspective, as Isabel has become “little more than a reluctant receptacle for male – whether spiritual or physical – influence” (280). The strict and rather misogynous religious teachings, coupled with her husband’s increased desire to control his wife, only aggravate Isabel’s growing dissatisfaction and furor with the prescribed code of conduct for women implicit in Spanish institutions. Her agitation culminates in yet another rant against her husband’s attempts to calm her: “Es diferente… Tú eres hombre… tienes todos los privilegios… Yo, mujer, soy la responsable ante Dios de todo… de tus pecados y de los míos… ¡Es terrible, terrible ser mujer…! ¡Hay que sufrirlo todo… todo…! ¡Hasta la condenación eterna!” (212).

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Bell likens Isabel’s sudden onset to religious fervor to that of Ana Ozores’s in Leopoldo Alas’s La Regenta (1884). She elaborates an astute comparison of these two characters, and the ending of the novels, as a way of proving what she suggests is Burgos’s dissatisfaction with the literary women created by popular male authors (like Galdós and Clarín) (Bell 277-82). Bell’s article also compares Isabel to Galdós’s Isidora, of La desheredada (273-77).
This brings to mind a curious comparison between the ideology promoted by the Catholic Church and that espoused by many scientists. In this case, the priest’s questionable advice actually echoes Marañón’s rather anti-feminist justification of the feminist concept of voluntary motherhood. It is important to remember that Burgos’s confirmed respect for Marañón’s research was not entirely unfounded, likely owing to the fact that the endocrinologist was an open advocate of “maternidad consciente” (Marañón, “Maternidad” 76). However, upon further examining Marañón’s position as he elaborates it in “Maternidad,” it becomes evident that the deductive reasoning behind this potentially beneficial position in actuality contradicts feminist tenets. For example, rather than stressing the importance of limiting maternity and childbirth in order for a woman to have an identity other than that of wife and mother, or specifically for her own health and well-being, Marañón believes conscious maternity will reduce adultery, as “la madre, envejecida prematuramente, malhumorada, cuando no enferma y temerosa del tálamo […] pierda todo el encanto sexual para el esposo” (96). He declares: “El gran dilema imperativo es éste: si se acepta la prohibición rigurosa de la limitación voluntaria de la maternidad, se abre automáticamente la puerta al adulterio” (95-96). Considering this affirmation, one might ask whether the priest may have also been based, in part, on Marañón! To be fair, Marañón does show great concern for the high infant and maternal mortality rates in this same argument (102-05), but unfortunately this is certainly not the driving motivation behind his advocating motherhood by choice. Later in his essay, he invokes Fray Luis, insisting that every woman should read at least two very important chapters of his La perfecta casada, specifically Chapter XVIII, “De cómo pertenece al oficio de la perfecta casada hacer bueno al marido y de la obligación que tiene la que es madre de criar por sí a los hijos” (“Maternidad” 106).  

148 The other portion of La perfecta casada which Marañón believes should be required reading is Chapter XI,
Even more, he explains that “casi todas las novias españolas reciben, entre los regalos nupciales, un librito admirable, La perfecta casada, del maestro Fray Luis de León,” but that the problem resides in the fact that “casi ninguna lo lee” (106). Clearly, we can see where Marañón’s work failed feminist women, and how decidedly conservative, paternalistic convictions nevertheless permeated his purportedly progressive, modern agenda. In Quiero vivir mi vida, Burgos proceeds to illustrate the erroneous potential of the “rationality” informing Marañón’s theories through a rather absurd plot twist.

In fact, Burgos uses adultery as the catalyst for the ensuing theatrical plot twist. We have already observed how Burgos criticized the double-standards surrounding marital infidelity in La mujer moderna, and her complaint that adultery is appraised only as a “female offense” makes it the perfect device for the novel’s most pivotal, climactic moment. In the final chapters, readers promptly learn that Isabel’s husband (Julio) begins an affair with Matilde, a young woman who works as a clerk in his bank. When she becomes pregnant and gives birth, Julio makes a concerted effort to support the mother of his child (unlike Burgos’s Francisco in La rampa). He pays for an apartment near the bank and begins to carry on a double life – “un paréntesis en su vida” as he terms it (191). He visits Matilde and their son whenever he can escape work or make an excuse to Isabel, “seguro de poder pasar por el mejor marido del mundo” (190). Yet the narrator explains that Julio lacks the intense paternal feelings towards his offspring, given that Isabel is not the child’s mother: “En realidad no había experimentado por el hijo la pasión que él esperaba sentir […] por un hijo de Isabel. Cuando le enseñaron aquella criaturita blanda y rosa, entre lazos y encajes, su corazón no le

“Del trata y apacible condición que deben tener las señoras con sus sirvientes y criadas” (“Maternidad” 106).
dijo nada. Fue después, poco a poco, cuando el niño empezó a ganar su cariño” (189). As a man, Julio is able to distance himself both physically and emotionally from his child.

Mangini has argued that Julio’s secrecy – his affair, mistress, and child – along with his selfish attitude and behavior, demonstrate his excessive narcissism, a key fact that Marañón overlooked in his defense of Julio as the “victim” (“The Female” 23). This is indeed a pertinent observation, as the narrator explains that, after his visits with Matilde and their child, Julio leaves “feliz y saitsfecho, con inconsciencia de la situación que había creado a aquel hijo y aquella pobre mujer, que ocupaban en su vida un lugar tan secundario” (191).

When Isabel discovers his affair, Julio begs for forgiveness, but maintains that he cannot completely abandon his responsibilities towards Matilde and their child. Isabel’s fury is tempered by her recognition of her own infidelities, and she even considers revealing her indiscretion to Julio. As she is obsessively aware of the double-standards surrounding marital infidelity, however, she tests the waters first by asking Julio if he would forgive her were she to have committed adultery. His response epitomizes the male chauvinism behind the traditional patriarchal formulation of honor, which revolved primarily around control of female sexuality: “No es igual, Isabel” (240); “¡Te mataría!” (242). Julio’s adherence to such a one-sided vision of morality – with clear echoes of the rhetoric employed in Golden Age honor plays – understandably infuriates Isabel. She lashes out in a final rage against her

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149 Margarita Nelken deals with the implications of this apparently recognized and accepted social phenomenon in the context of feminism in her novel En torno a nosotras (1927). The more conservative of her two female characters even posits that “El hombre no puede jamás pronunciar como ella: mi hijo” (En torno a nosotras 86). Chapter three of this dissertation will explore this novel in more detail.

150 Scott K. Taylor summarizes the principal features of Spanish Golden Age “honor plays” by Calderón and Lope in his study, Honor and Violence in Golden Age Spain (2008). Taylor describes three features of these plays: first, the honor of men was dependent on the behavior of the women in their lives (wives, daughters, sisters, etc); secondly, the honor of women (and therefore the men in their lives) depended entirely on sexual behavior; and finally, men could protect or restore honor through violent revenge (2-3). While Taylor emphasizes the fact that these plays did not mirror reality, he does recognize their existence as indicative of the central role that honor played in guiding behavior and defining one’s reputation in early modern Spanish
situation as a woman in this society before dramatically killing her husband: “No soy de las mujeres que pueden perdonar,” “¡No te puedo aguantar!,” “Aborrezco a los hombre… los deprecio… y quiero ser hombre también!,” “Es un asco ser mujer” (240-43).

Mangini has suggested that, when Isabel finally murders Julio, she in fact kills the “prosperous patriarchal everyman” who has all the privileges and power in Spanish patriarchal society (“The Female” 29). Furthermore, this dramatic reversal of a Calderonian honor play, as Johnson terms it (Gender and Nation 209), is sparked not only by Isabel’s intense rage upon learning of her husband’s affair, but also by his hypocritical insistence that she forgive him, despite his open declaration that he would kill Isabel were she to be unfaithful to him. Thus the ubiquitous celos which Marañón blames for her rather psychotic meltdown, even centering his prologue to the novel on jealousy, are not the only driving force behind this finale. We must keep in mind, too, that Isabel has also had an extramarital affair, thus Johnson’s suggestions that the protagonist acts as a man in her response to sexual jealousy is not an entirely sufficient explanation (209). While Isabel may be portrayed as conflicted, chronically dissatisfied and even neurotic, I believe the narrative is not constructed to make the readers turn against her. On the contrary, this “gothic anti-heroine” (Mangini, “The Female” 30) actually elicits sympathy, whereas Julio does not, given his overtly hypocritical, and violent, responses to Isabel’s queries. I agree with Mangini when she notes that Marañón misreads – or selectively reads – the novel, given that

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culture. He concludes that honor was more of a “rhetoric” than a rigid code, and that Spaniards evoked honor as a means of managing relations with their neighbors and maintaining their place and reputation within the community (7-8).

Johnson arrives at a similar interpretation, noting that “Isabel gives herself the rights that the social and legal systems have denied her” (Gender and Nation 210). Burgos was particularly concerned with the outdated Código civil, which, in her opinion, did all but condone wife-murder in cases of marital infidelity by prescribing drastically different punishments for murderous wives than for murderous husbands (see La mujer moderna, chapter VI-IX). She explains her disdain for these antiquated laws: “Las costumbres han evolucionado mucho a favor de la mujer. Lo que se necesita es que los Códigos marchen de acuerdo con las costumbres y no pretendan fijar la vida en textos inmóviles” (60).
he sympathizes with Julio as the victim and ignores his adulterous affair, despite condemning such male behavior in his own essays (“The Female” 22).\footnote{Curiously, Johnson has documented other instances in which she believes Marañón fails as a literary critic, specifically in his quite comical interpretation of key components of the Don Juan myth: “According to Marañón, it only seems that Don Juan chases women; it is really women who follow him and surrender themselves (one wonders at Marañón’s ability to interpret literary texts!)” (\textit{Gender and Nation} 188).}

\footnotetext[152]{Curiously, Johnson has documented other instances in which she believes Marañón fails as a literary critic, specifically in his quite comical interpretation of key components of the Don Juan myth: “According to Marañón, it only seems that Don Juan chases women; it is really women who follow him and surrender themselves (one wonders at Marañón’s ability to interpret literary texts!)” (\textit{Gender and Nation} 188).} Literary critics like Mangini and Johnson, however, have not been inclined to ignore Julio’s adultery as a key impetus to the dramatic denouement. Careful analyses clearly reveal that Isabel’s (over)reaction is fueled not by simple jealously of her husband’s extra-marital affair, but by both her husband’s indifference to his own transgressions and her own complex feelings of inferiority upon learning Julio has had a child with another woman.\footnote{Mangini admits that jealousy exists, but stresses that it is not the sole cause of Isabel’s rage; she attributes the cause instead to “her envy of Julio, who symbolizes the prosperous patriarchal everyman” (“The Female” 30).} In a culture which is unwilling to accept her denial of the maternal role within marriage, Isabel has now been doubly-defeated. Not only does her husband’s mistress defeat her, but more significantly this woman’s maternity triumphs over the childless Isabel: “su maternidad que la hacía parecer superior” (241). It is not the infidelity that disturbs Isabel, but rather a myriad of factors stemming from this woman’s willingness to bear children for Julio (“es el hijo el que me inquieta”) and her own husband’s “amor irracional al hijo” (241).

As a final observation, we must consider the way in which Burgos employs language in this novel, specifically the Marañónian terms “intersexualidad” and “viriloide(s).” Judith A. Kirkpatrick has suggested that, in Burgos’s appropriation of terms like meticonería and entrometida, typically negative labels for women when viewed from a masculine perspective, Burgos repurposes such descriptors (“Skeletons” 399). Thus, Kirkpatrick suggests that Burgos understands these labels to be positive concepts if interpreted from a woman’s viewpoint, given that she enlists this vocabulary primarily to describe “women who test their
boundaries and make men uncomfortable when they establish their female presence in a man’s world” (399). I find Kirkpatrick’s interpretation convincing, and thus suggest that we consider Burgos’s use of Marañónian terminology, and even his entire theory of “intersexualidad,” as a similar manipulation of patriarchal language. By doing so, it becomes clear that *Quiero vivir mi vida* is not merely the elaboration of psychotic case-study for Marañónian theory, but rather a clever dramatization of the difficulties of being female in a paradoxical society.

Despite the fact that increased feminist consciousness gave rise to the awareness that marriage and motherhood were not necessarily the only options available to women in modern society, Burgos shows the difficulty of putting into practice many of these feminist tenets, especially in a traditionally conservative society. In fact, the persistence of the prevalent ángel del hogar paradigm continued to place a unique value on wives and mothers, and had the unfortunate effect of devaluing other feminine identities. Despite any success or self-sufficiency, single, working-class women, educated professional women, and women involved in the arts (theater, art or literature), were often judged as anomalies, even narcissists. Through the downfall of her protagonist and the dismantling of Marañón’s theory, Burgos criticizes contemporary Spanish society and culture which continued to lend credence to patriarchal values, still largely based on antiquated concepts of honor and gender roles. These restrictive, often arbitrarily prescriptive roles deliberately assigned women a subordinate position in the social order. Considering the importance Carmen de Burgos placed on educating women – as much for careers outside the home as for conscious and

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154 Bell highlights the lack of “socially acceptable” outlets through which an upper-class, married woman like Isabel may temper her frustrations (for example, cultivating her beauty, attending parties and public events, traveling). Bell observes that “engaging in these pursuits contributes to the perception that she is relentlessly frivolous and vain” (272).
voluntary motherhood – we can consider *Quiero vivir mi vida* as yet another cautionary tale. Her feminist agenda, then, advocated change and reform not only in the realm of materiality and urban society (as we have seen in *La rampa*), but also regarding both traditional and modern bourgeois ideologies in order to improve the situation of women in relation to their potential, *voluntary*, roles as mothers.
Chapter 3: The Economics of Motherhood and the Defense of Maternity in the Literature of Margarita Nelken

As one of the most vocal women within the Spanish feminist movement, who defended women’s rights in the workforce and even came to participate in government herself, Margarita Nelken also exhibited what many might (mis)interpret as a curious “conservative” tendency when it came to maternity and motherhood. This chapter will focus on the crucial value our second author placed on the so-called “conservative” estimation of women as mothers within her feminist thought. Her essays, *La condición social de la mujer en España* (1919) and *La mujer ante las cortes constituyentes* (1931), will encourage more nuanced interpretations of Nelken’s two novels, *La trampa del arenal* (1923) and *En torno a nosotras* (1927). Together, these publications will reveal Nelken’s demands for radical social changes which would afford respect for all women – not only as citizens, workers, wives, and especially mothers – but as individuals. As she wholeheartedly believed, each woman deserved this type of individual respect, “sencillamente porque es un ser humano, y que todo ser humano tiene el deber, para consigo mismo y para con los demás, de perfeccionar sus condiciones lo más posible. No entendemos de otro modo el verdadero feminismo” (*La condición social* 235). This mantra applied as much to single, independent, perhaps childless women...
women as it did to married women and mothers. The challenge, however, lie in women’s ability and willingness to recognize that their right to maximize their potential as an individual, regardless of their liberal or conservative inclinations, is itself inherently feminist.

First, in the realist novel *La trampa del arenal*, Nelken juxtaposes motherhood and economic (in)stability as one way of illustrating her belief in the mutual dependence of the social and feminist revolutions. The novel demonstrates the cultural landscape’s failure to successfully modernize whilst clinging to the traditionally gendered social structure characterized by the public/private divide that delineated appropriate male and female social roles. As the drama unfolds, it becomes apparent that a successful women’s movement would ultimately benefit both women *and* men as they struggle to adapt to the new demands of modern, urban lifestyles. Secondly, in *En torno a nosotras*, Nelken presents the common, yet complex dialectic existing between different types of Spanish women who identify as feminists, despite the fact that they subscribe to very different beliefs regarding women’s role as wife and mother. The philosophical dialogue which unfolds is ambiguous, thus demonstrating the difficulty of progressing with an exclusively liberal feminist agenda in a Spanish culture that refused to relinquish tradition.

**The Feminism of Margarita Nelken (1896-1968)**

Though her increasingly radical political stance eventually drove her into exile, Margarita Nelken (1896-1968) earned an immense amount of respect from her contemporaries for both her work as a socially-conscious novelist and essayist, as well as her political and feminist activism. In fact, Nelken’s achievements are even more noteworthy when considering that she was writing in Spain from what Mary Lee Bretz refers to as a
“triply marginal position,” given that she was an outspoken feminist, a Socialist, and a woman of Jewish descent. As Bretz aptly states, Nelken was forced to “continuously and cautiously construct a position of authority,” as she was “writing from outside the existing sources of power” (102). Nelken’s provocative 1919 essay, *La condición social de la mujer en España*, inspired an immense amount of controversy and debate, and was even prohibited in some schools and universities (Capmany 22; Martínez, *Exiliadas* 52). Even more, in the years leading up to the Spanish Civil War, she adopted a more combative attitude, becoming one of the most representative figures of resistance throughout the ensuing years of conflict. Nelken abandoned the socialist party in order to join the communist cause, which she felt had more potential to combat the increasingly radical and oppressive fascist forces (Martínez, *Exiliadas* 85-56).¹⁵⁵ Federica Montseny, also a woman of leftist principles and the subject of the present study’s third chapter, has described this socialist defection and subsequent communist association as Nelken’s greatest misstep, stating that “ella [Nelken] había pagado bastante caro sus errores” (qtd. in Thon, 15). Consequently, it comes as no surprise that the work of such a radical, forward-thinking and leftist female writer should be omitted from the annals of Spanish literary history upon the fall of the Second Spanish Republic and her own subsequent political exile during the stifling decades of Franco’s dictatorship. Mangini notes that in the Spain of the twenties and thirties, Nelken was indeed a radical feminist; yet when judged by today’s standards she does not appear as such (*Memories* 31). In my estimation,

¹⁵⁵ According to Borrachero, Nelken joined the communist party in 1936 after her collaboration with the republican forces during the conflict leading up to the Civil War, and went into exile in Mexico where she would remain until her death in 1968 (26). However Nelken was not the only female activist to defect to the communist party during the tumultuous years of the Spanish Civil War. Scanlon explains: “Otras mujeres destacadas en la escena política habían encontrado demasiado moderado al Partido Socialista y se unieron a los comunistas. Margarita Nelken se había hecho comunista […] En la conferencia del Partido Comunista celebrada el 5 de enero de 1938 habló extensamente del papel de la mujer en la guerra e instó a que se crearan núcleos especiales de mujeres, ya que a muchas les resultaba difícil asistir a las reuniones del partido que tenían lugar a las diez de la noche (297).
then, Nelken’s work during this particular historical moment must not be overlooked, as her observations may provide possibilities for scholars to appreciate the breadth of Spanish women’s concerns within their writing during that same time period, the ensuing dictatorship, and even into the present day.\footnote{Marlene LeGates has emphasized the importance of analyzing “specific historical contexts” when discussing feminism and female consciousness in history, not as a way of providing answers, but rather of illustrating issues (6-7). I follow LeGates in this respect, as she suggests this approach will “open possibilities, so that we can appreciate the breadth of women’s concerns and strategies, [rather] than eliminate them by imposing an arbitrary definition of feminism on the past” (7).}

Born in Madrid in 1896, Nelken’s parents were German immigrants of Jewish descent who made sure their daughters received an assiduous education. Nelken began to study language, music, art and literature at an early age. She studied painting in Paris, and her artistic talent was soon evident, affording her both collective and individual exhibitions in cities such as Barcelona, Bilbao, Paris and Vienna (Bretz 100). Sadly, Nelken suffered from failing eyesight which soon forced her to give up painting; she began to write and teach art, art history and criticism instead. In 1917, she gave birth to her first child, a daughter, in Madrid. The child was recorded as Magdalena Nelken – no father’s name was officially documented – and Nelken promptly took on the identity of a single mother at only twenty-one years of age (Martínez-Gutiérrez 21). Historians and literary scholars tend to agree that the father of her daughter was the young artist Julio Antonio, who died in 1919, and with whom Nelken was deeply enamored.\footnote{According to Martínez-Gutiérrez, “Parece probable que el padre fuera el escultor Julio Antonio, cuya temprana muerte sumió a Margarita en un profundo dolor. La hija es fruto de una relación anterior a su matrimonio con Martín de Paúl” (21-22). Antonio died of tuberculosis in Madrid in 1919, at only thirty years of age (Ena Bordonada 13).} Her second child, a son, was born in Madrid in 1921; however she would not marry his father, Martín de Paúl, until twelve years later when the divorce from his first wife was finalized in 1933 (14). Their marriage, however, would last
only until her exile in 1939. Nelken began writing critical essays around 1919, but she did not limit her feminist and social activism to journalism, but rather engaged in active reform within her community. In 1919, she founded a day-care center, *La casa de los niños de España*, in the Ventas region of Madrid, which was equipped to care for up to eighty children of working-class women – either single or married (Capmany 22). This institution was unfortunately short-lived, partially due to economic problems, but largely owing to resistance and complaints from conservative sectors – mainly the Catholic Church – that disapproved of secular charities and orphanages (Kern, “Margarita Nelken” 148). The church also complained of Nelken’s consistent refusal to hire religious personnel to care for and educate the children (Ena Bordonada 13).

As a stark advocate of women’s rights in the workplace, and workers’ rights in general, Nelken led the first strike of female workers in Madrid’s tobacco factory, and later became involved in peasant strikes in more rural Spanish towns like Badajoz (Kern, “Margarita Nelken” 152). Throughout the twenties, Nelken traveled and lectured extensively on both Socialism and Feminism. After the fall of the monarchy in 1931, she was one of the first three women elected to the constituent parliament as a representative of the socialist party, and she was re-elected in 1933 and 1936 (152). While the drafted constitution of the Second Republic was one of the most liberal for its time, allowing divorce, universal suffrage, and equality before the law, Nelken herself continued to oppose women’s suffrage, even after it had been granted (200). She elaborates on this controversial “feminist” position

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158 According to Ena Bordonada, Nelken’s husband, Martín de Paul, had already begun living with another woman in Spain by the time his wife had left for Mexico in 1939 (27). She adds that “Margarita nunca aceptó la situación sentimental de su marido” (27). When he moved to Mexico in 1940 with a much younger woman, Nelken openly criticized him for this behavior, even as late as 1949 (28).

159 Nelken was joined by the socialist-radical Victoria Kent and the radical Clara Campoamor (Davies, “Feminist” 200).
in *La mujer ante las cortes constituyentes*, insisting that Spanish women were still far too uneducated and susceptible to the influence of patriarchal powers (their husbands or priests, for example) to be capable of voting with their own best interests in mind (9-36). In her main argument against this right, she reiterates that the vote is simply a question of quantity, not quality: “Una votación no es cuestión de calidad, sino de cantidad” (21, 30). That is, despite the increase in educated women, some socialists, and several professional women, “nada pueden significar frente a la aplastante mayoría de mujeres directa y patentemente en pugna con los ideales de sus compañeros, de sus padres o de sus hijos” (22). She cites the powerful influence of the Catholic church in the majority of Spanish women’s lives: “No hay una sola mujer española, católica practicante, es decir, una sola mujer que se confiese, que no haya sido interrogada por su confesor acerca de sus ideas políticas y acerca de la inclinación que ha de darles y que ha de procurar dar a las de cuantos la rodean” (21).

During the tumultuous years preceding the Spanish Civil War, Nelken continued to advocate on behalf of workers and women, and her political involvement at times eclipsed her feminist activity. For her involvement in a 1934 strike and failed revolt of workers in an Asturian mine that led to the death of several guards and workers, she spent a year exiled in Moscow. Upon her return to Madrid in 1936, she made clear her allegiance to Marxist principles, and promptly aligned herself with the proletariat cause (Ena Bordonada 18-19). Later, in the absence of the central government, her voice permeated radio airwaves with passionate resistance as she led the defense of Madrid against the Fascist forces in 1936 (Martínez, *Exiliadas* 72). Nelken’s politics became increasingly radical after 1936, and while she continued her work with the Socialist party well into the Civil War, she joined the Communist party in 1937 (Kern, “Margarita Nelken” 157). Nelken was forced into exile after
the war – fleeing first to France, and then to Mexico. In Mexico, she was welcomed in political, intellectual and cultural circles, and received the support and patronage of the Mexican government which allowed her to publish numerous articles and books of art criticism (Ena Bordonada 28-29). Nelken would never return to Spain, and she died in Mexico in 1968.

While Nelken was dedicated to a wide-range of social, political, and intellectual issues ranging from feminism, labor reform, socialism, political praxis, and even art criticism, the years spanning from 1920 through 1931 comprise what is arguably Nelken’s most feminist-oriented decade (Martínez-Gutiérrez 281). The remainder of this chapter will explore her writings during these feminist years, specifically concentrating on the way in which Nelken valued mothers and maternity. Despite the fact that she does not deny the existence of a powerful maternal instinct in women who choose to become mothers, Nelken was acutely aware of the socio-cultural conditioning that reinforced the notion that women should aspire to be mothers above all else. She fought for social reform and legislation which would make this important maternal role compatible with participation in the labor force and public policies. Shirley Mangini suggests that it was largely due to Nelken’s own personal circumstance as a single mother during the years prior to her marriage that rendered her “una feroz defensora de la madre” (“El papel” 172). Maternity and motherhood are core themes which direct Nelken’s feminist thought, and several critics and historians have noted this fact. Josebe Martínez Gutiérrez has rightly categorized the central role that maternity and motherhood play in Nelken’s literary output – in both her fictional and essayistic prose: “La

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160 Interestingly, all three women in this study were, to some extent, single mothers at some point during their lives. Burgos left her abusive husband for Madrid with her young daughter in tow and Montseny was often a “single mother” for months at a time while her husband spend periods of time in exile for his outspoken anarchist activities.
maternidad, tan crucial a nivel privado, es el asunto más reiterado en la obra de Nelken anterior a la guerra civil… Considera al ‘instinto’ de la maternidad como el más sagrado y profundo de la vida y forma parte del desenvolvimiento sexual de la mujer” (22). Roberta Johnson has similarly observed that Nelken emphasized women’s maternal obligations, but Johnson downplays any semblance of essentialism in this acceptance of biological differences between the sexes by focusing on the feminist goals behind such a stance (Gender and Nation 247). That is, Johnson notes that it was precisely through this recognition of difference that Nelken argued for special legislation for women, such as equal pay in the workplace, divorce, and childcare (247). In this way, Nelken’s acceptance of difference echoes that of Carmen de Burgos, who similarly acknowledged distinctive qualities and sensibilities among women and men for utilitarian purposes.  

Nelken’s sociological essays, La condición social de la mujer en España: su estado actual y su posible desarrollo (1919) and La mujer ante las cortes constituyentes (1931), promise to shed much light on the feminist agenda – specifically her particular evaluation of motherhood – which propels her fiction. La condición social appeared in Barcelona at a time when Nelken was becoming a more widely known public figure, promoting her quite outspoken and politically radical ideas through her writing. The principal purpose of La condición social was not only to draw attention to the desolate conditions in which much of

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161 Burgos took care to emphasize that these distinctions must not be qualified as “inferior” or “superior,” and thus they themselves could not justify the existence of separate spheres for men and women. See Chapter III of La mujer moderna y sus derechos for her position on the morphological differences between men and women and the manner in which these “differences” should, and should not, be invoked.

162 Some critics disagree on the date of La condición social de la mujer en España. Borrachero believes the date to be 1922, the year preceding the 1923 “crisis de Estado” (21). Mangini (Las modernas) and Ena Bordonada refer to 1921 as the year of publication. Capmany believes the date of the first edition of this text to be as early as 1919, justifying this dating as follows: “Doy como fecha de la edición el 1919, deduciéndolo del comentario sobre unos hechos acaecidos a principios de este año y que la autora refiere como pretérito inmediato. Claro que la edición puede ser más tardía, pero no creo que se pueda fechar mucho más allá del año 20” (9). Josebe Martínez, who has written extensively on the life and work of Nelken, also believes the date to be 1919 (Exiliadas 56). I will refer to the earlier date given by Capmany and Martínez throughout the present study.
the female population lived – especially working-class women – but to *denounce* these conditions with the goal of enacting changes in both policy and perception. Not surprisingly, a book with such intrepid goals caused an intense public reaction at the time of its publication. Liberal writers and organizations came to its defense, while conservative groups objected to its further publication and use in public education (Capmany 22). Such controversy was propelled, in part, by the fact that *La condición social* dealt openly and directly with controversial issues, like prostitution, divorce, and single motherhood. Capmany identifies the appearance of this book as “un punto clave en la evolución política de Margarita Nelken” (22); Davies refers to it as “aggressive… a soul-stirring attack” (“Feminist” 197); and Nelken herself notes that her work was:

…virulentamente atacada hasta el punto de sustituir a una profesora de la Normal de Lérida que explicaba sociología con este texto, lo cual motivó debates enconados en Cortes, bajo la monarquía, interviniendo Prieto a su favor, y que dio origen a una verdadera campaña contra mí de las derechas.

(qtd. in Martínez, *Exiliadas* 52)

This emotional public reaction came largely in response to the extensive attention paid to women’s condition within all social classes (including prostitutes) and the critique of their relationships with various groups and institutions, such as the Catholic Church, working- and middle-class men, women of the upper- and middle-classes, and the national and international communities (Bretz 101). In addition, Nelken references well-known foreign socialist reformers Ferdinand August Bebel and John Stuart Mill extensively, even citing their work at length as chapter epigraphs and within the body of the essay. These thinkers were extremely controversial in Spain at the time, as Scanlon has observed: “En España se
veía en Bebel la encarnación del diablo, un personaje mucho más peligroso que John Stuart Mill” (230). Clear from its detailed title and subtitle, Nelken’s *La condición social* exhibits what Bretz refers to as “dual-temporality,” fusing the objective acknowledgment of present conditions with optimistic prescriptions for a successful feminist movement in the future (107-08).

In 1926 Nelken published *Maternología y puericultura*, an essay that originally appeared as chapter VII of *La condición social*. The fact that this particular chapter was republished independently several years later is indeed indicative of both Nelken’s ongoing concern for the improved health and welfare children, pregnant women, and all mothers, regardless of marital status,¹⁶³ as well as her recognition of the complex position that motherhood occupied within the feminist movement. As Nelken states in this essay: “En nombre de la maternidad, muchos protestan contra el feminismo, cuyo triunfo ha de traer a las mujeres la libertad del trabajo, el salario regularizado y, en una palabra, la mejora de sus condiciones materiales” (*La condición social* 126; *Maternología* 15). This piece concludes with several important points regarding women in relation to their potential roles as mothers:

¹⁶³ We must remember that the infant mortality rate in Spain during the early twentieth century was still extremely high, though the statistics do demonstrate a pattern of slow decline. In 1901 nearly 186 of 1,000 infants born alive died within one year of birth (Gómez Redondo 34). By 1910, this number was 149.3 per 1,000 live births; by 1920, it had increased to 165.2; and by 1930, it had gone down to 123.76 (34). Gómez Redondo also notes that the infant mortality rate declined much slower in Spain than in other Western European nations: “El descenso de la mortalidad general se retrasa respecto a la cronología europea y aún más tardío es el comienzo de la transición de la mortalidad infantil… entendiendo por transición el paso de unas altas a bajas tasas en un período relativamente corto de tiempo, pero, sobre todo, caracterizada por una tendencia al descenso regular y sostenido en todas sus regiones y por un cambio estructural de esta mortalidad específica” (31). For example, Spain had a much higher rate than England, Switzerland, Holland, and France, and the high rates reported at the turn of the century in Germany, Italy and Belgium decreased much more rapidly than Spain’s (38). Only Portugal, Hungary and Czechoslovakia consistently recorded higher rates of infant death (38). Regarding the high mortality rate of women in childbirth, Davies credits this health issue with increasing women’s propensity to religious faith (*Spanish Women’s Writing* 100). For more information on infant mortality rates and childhood illness, see Rosa Gómez Redondo’s *La mortalidad infantil española en el siglo XX*.
Precisamente, considerando como están aquí las cuestiones de maternología y de puericultura es cuando más se anhela el advenimiento de un nuevo espíritu en la mujer española, un espíritu que la haga, en todas las clases sociales, desechar hipocresías; que la haga tener conciencia plena de sí misma, de su ser físico y moral y sentirse orgullosa de su preparación natural y sabia para sus deberes de mujer y de madre. (*La condición social* 127; *Maternología* 16)

Nelken even believed that women should fight for their rights as mothers before fighting for political rights like suffrage: “Antes que el derecho al sufragio… úrgele a la mujer española ver reconocidos y protegidos sus derechos como madre (*La mujer* 64).” The obstacle she observed, however, was the fact that women did not recognize that they could, or even *should*, have “rights” as mothers. She parses the intricacies of this argument, pointing out that she is not advocating preferential treatment for all women, only *mothers* – a clear indication of her respect for this social responsibility which she believed was undervalued and disrespected: “Así como no creemos que la mujer, por el hecho de ser mujer, pueda recabar privilegio ninguno con respecto a su cónyuge, creemos que la madre, por el hecho de ser madre, merece en toda circunstancia trato de especialísimo privilegio” (*La mujer* 58).

The attention paid to motherhood as a feminist issue is indeed augmented in this second prose essay, *La mujer ante las cortes constituyentes* (1931), penned just after the onset of the Second Republic. This publication acknowledges that women had indeed made

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164 See *La mujer ante las cortes constituyentes* (9-36), where Nelken explicitly outlines her stance on women’s suffrage. This was a “women’s right” that Nelken actually *opposed*, due to her belief that Spanish women were still too uneducated, and susceptible to the wills of the church and their husbands, to appropriately handle such a socio-political responsibility.
many gains, while further detailing those steps required for continued progress.\textsuperscript{165} The text takes up many of the themes set forth in \textit{La condición social} (feminism, suffrage, prostitution, marriage, divorce, religion), but Nelken increases the attention paid to the treatment of women as mothers within each of these realms. Here, Nelken illustrates the pitfalls of equating (and even conflating) the roles of wife and mother, as this move established an artificially restrictive definition of womanhood. Problematically, conservative institutions idealized this paradigm, which had the unfortunate effect of provoking and perpetuating the condemnation of unmarried mothers. Nelken’s defense of mothers, regardless of their marital status, is essential to her feminist project, as she advocated respect and non-discriminatory assistance for any women fulfilling this particular female role: “Hablar ahora de reivindicación en la condición de la madre soltera, o en la de los hijos habidos fuera de matrimonio, equivaldría a una redundancia; más aún: a una perogrullada” \textit{(La mujer 57)}. Nelken considered the disdain for unmarried mothers to be a driving force behind some of the most pressing social issues, including infanticide and prostitution (55-56). She chastised purportedly charitable institutions for the lack of respect given to pregnant women and single mothers and their children who are most in need of assistance: “Todas nuestras organizaciones benéficas se han cerrado ante ellos […] únicamente las Inclusas, con el bochorno, desconocido ya en todo país civilizado, de sus tornos, abríanse ante los hijos sin padre” (56-57). Furthermore, as a manifestation of female sexuality, many women perceived and experienced their pregnancy as a shameful state which should be hidden or silenced. In Nelken’s opinion, this was a grave injustice:

\textsuperscript{165} Regarding the gains made by women, Nelken acknowledges: “Por primera vez la personalidad de la mujer española va a ser reconocida por la ley. Por primera vez no se la va a considerar como eterna menor” \textit{(La mujer 5)}.
Las particularísimas normas del catolicismo español; la clase de virtud que impone a sus mujeres y que podría definirse con la imagen de ciertos animales que esconden la cabeza para no ser vistos; esa virtud estrecha de fórmulas, y cuya dominante es la hipocresía, ha prescindido en absoluto del aspecto maternal de la mujer soltera, pretendiendo con ello negar la existencia de la maternidad considerada fuera de la ley. (*La mujer* 55)

In order for mothers to garner the respect they deserved, Nelken encouraged this veil of silence and shame surrounding sexuality to be removed through an improved, more practical education. The most appropriate education would not only prepare women for possible careers outside the home, but also adequately instruct and counsel them on the demands of maternity and motherhood, should they experience an unplanned pregnancy or even consciously choose to have children.

Finally, Nelken was cautious in explicitly advocating motherhood (much like Burgos, yet quite the opposite of Montseny, as we will see in Chapter 4). Far from promoting this traditional female role, she effectively fought to re-structure the gendered ideology which placed responsibilities for child-rearing entirely on women and mothers. She believed this practice, so ingrained in Spanish culture, produced a negative social situation for men, women, and children as members of the purportedly ideal, nuclear familial unit. Specifically, economic security depended on the work of the male head of the family (husband and father) outside the home, and thus the woman (wife and mother), as well as her children, were entirely dependent on the patriarch. Remaining in the private sphere of the home afforded a woman few opportunities to further her education, earn money, or expand her social
community. In Nelken’s mind, feminism in Spain was intrinsically connected to these two core aspects of modern society: economic stability and wage labor in the public sphere:

Nuestro feminismo es reciente y es escaso, y esto podría explicarse quizá por su causa determinante, que es puramente económica… Que si muy importante es para la mujer conseguir una amplia libertad del trabajo, no menos importante es para ella conseguir un justo reconocimiento de su personalidad jurídica, pues sin esto la independencia económica, único ideal en el fondo del feminismo español… no puede existir. (La condición social 35)

If we consider Nelken’s personal feminist philosophy regarding the unique demands of Spanish feminism, together with the more widespread trend of maternal feminism throughout Western Europe, we might reevaluate what at times might appear to be her “conservative” evaluation of women as mothers. By establishing these parameters, it will become clear that Nelken’s feminist vision does not center on contesting or defending women’s role as mothers in the domestic sphere, but rather it revolves around a direct challenge to the gendered ideology informing the restrictive separate spheres dichotomy which still pervaded the Spanish social landscape.166 That is, Nelken advocated improved education and freedom of choice for women within the private sphere, but also fought for access to appropriate wage labor and social support systems so that women would not be denied the opportunity to participate in public life. Most importantly, in conjunction with these aims she simultaneously and wholeheartedly embraced voluntary motherhood, never questioning,

166 Mary Nash explains the specificities of this public/private divide in Spain: “Es habitual en España la rígida separación de las esferas, la sublimación de la mujer madre, y […] la doble moral sexual […] Sin embargo, las premisas que justifican esta diferencia entre los sexos en el caso español no obedecen exclusivamente a un razonamiento laico ni a la lógica de una burguesía emprendedora, sino que se fundamentan también en la doctrina católica en torno a la mujer y la familia (Mujer, familia y trabajo 42-43). Shirley Mangini also credits the prevalence of the ángel del hogar as a strong, traditional ideological force with reinforcing this gendered, social divide (Las modernas 25-26).
challenging, or rejecting the maternal role as a fundamental, *optional* component of female identity.

The Economics of Motherhood: (Re)Negotiating Gender in the Public and Private Spheres in *La trampa del arenal* (1923)

In the final pages of Margarita Nelken’s socially-minded realist narrative, *La trampa del arenal* (1923), Luis, the male protagonist, is jarred by a startling realization: “…Vendrían más hijos, no a colmar y bendecir una vida de alegre trabajo y de íntima compenetración de dos seres unidos para compartir las penas y las dichas, sino a hacer aún más estrecha, más fatigosa, más falta de paz y de armonía, una existencia sin ilusiones y sin ideal” (100). In this novel, the family and the private sphere constitute the crux of this young man’s disillusionment with marriage, fatherhood, and even his career. In other women-authored texts, however, such *penas* and *dichas* associated with more children are typically of primordial relevance to *women* as the primary caretakers. Yet in this urban novel, Nelken demonstrates that typically female-centered experiences – namely motherhood and marriage – are in fact universal social concerns that affect not only women as mothers and wives, but also men as fathers and husbands. Rather than present childbearing and childrearing as exclusively female responsibilities, and thus female “burdens” of which liberal feminists

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167 For example, as we have seen in Carmen de Burgos’s *La rampa*, Isabel suffers through a difficult and ultimately tragic experience as a mother, and the narrator even suggests that her pregnancy was a key contribution to both her economic suffering and final disillusionment. Moreover, several of Burgos’s short stories delve into women’s dissatisfaction and frustration with their lives in the private sphere, particularly within traditional marriages as wives and mothers: *La flor de la playa* (1920), *La malcasada* (1923) and *La mujer fantástica* (1925), for example. Several other Spanish novels of the late 19th- and early 20th- centuries also portray women who suffer (economically, physically, psychologically, or socially) within their marriages, or during childbirth and motherhood. These male- and female-authored texts include Fernán Caballero’s *La gaviota* (1849), Emilia Pardo Bazán’s *Los Pazos de Ulloa* (1886), Benito Pérez Galdós’s *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1887), Miguel de Unamuno’s *La Tía Tula* (1921), and Jose Díaz Fernández’s *La Venus mecánica* (1929). Outside of Spain, these same themes were also apparent: American novelist Charlotte Perkins Gilman penned *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892); American writer Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* appeared in 1899; and Italian novelist Sibilla Aleramo published an autobiographical tale of distressed motherhood within an oppressive marriage, *Una Donna (A Woman)* (1906).
sought to free themselves, Nelken preserves her respect for motherhood and shows that this role does not need to be rejected outright, but rather its culturally defined parameters must be altered. Just as Carmen de Burgos’s *La rampa* demonstrates the way in which maternity and motherhood often take physical, economic, and psychological tolls on women in Madrid, Nelken’s *La trampa del arenal* portrays these same urban concerns in a more egalitarian manner. The narrative exposes the way in which both men and women experience these negative effects in a culture so invested in maintaining traditional familial structures while resisting what were perceived as radical and immoral changes to gender roles within the family and society. In fact, Nelken’s *La trampa del arenal* shares many similarities with Burgos’s *La rampa*: both are urban novels set in Madrid; both deal explicitly with the difficulties of obtaining economic stability in the city; and both can be read as a sort of *bildungsroman*, albeit with rather pessimistic outcomes. However as we have seen, Burgos dedicates her novel to a varied female population, and the plot aims to reveal the actual condition of working-class women in the city through the misfortunes of a naïve female protagonist (Isabel). Contrarily, Nelken’s *La trampa del arenal* features a male protagonist, and the author does not focus exclusively on women as victims or on men as potential abusers, but rather paints a less dichotomous portrait of modern gender roles.

Curiously, critics have suggested that *La trampa del arenal*, Nelken’s only full-length novel, in fact exhibits latent manifestations of misogyny. Such interpretations focus on the

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168 Borrachero notes that *La trampa del arenal* can be read as a *bildungsroman*, owing to the fact that this genre was “muy del gusto del ’98” (23).

169 My interpretation of Burgos’s novel emphasizes the didactic potential of the text, most importantly in regards to the realities of motherhood and sexual relationships for young, working-class women in the city. Nelken’s novel, written six years later, highlights these same issues, which were extremely important to early twentieth century European feminists and to the growing strength of the women’s movement in 1920s Spain.

170 This position is not entirely surprising, given the author’s socialist views and her belief in the mutual dependence of the social and feminist revolutions. In fact, she rightly identified an ideological paradox: that an effective feminist movement would in fact be impossible without a social revolution, yet a social revolution must in fact take on women’s rights.
fact that the narrative ultimately presents a bourgeois male protagonist who suffers from what the omniscient narrator labels his most notable “error”: marrying the lower-class, cursi Salud upon learning she is pregnant (Ena Bordonada 64-66). Some scholars appear to sympathize exclusively with Luis as the unfortunate victim of a woman with bourgeois pretentions. The following analysis of La trampa del arenal will challenge such literary interpretations of the novel in an effort to demonstrate that Luis is neither the sole victim in this tale, nor is his unfavorable plight the fault of a conniving woman aspiring to improve her social standing. Ena Bordonada, for example, concurs with my hypothesis and has recognized that Luis and Salud are both victims, noting that “lo que parece misoginismo deja de serlo cuando se descubre en Margarita Nelken un deseo didáctico de mostrar a esa misma mujer a la que critica como la primera víctima de su situación de indefensión en la sociedad” (65). Building upon this interpretation, I suggest an alternative – less male-centered – analysis when contemplating the representations of victimhood within the novel. Previous studies have focused exclusively on Luis as the male-protagonist, and largely overlooked the two secondary-female characters that play crucial roles in the narrative. This chapter will call into question the assumption that a misogynist vein underlies this novel (featuring a male “victim”) by refusing to overlook Nelken’s very specific feminist stance as she outlines it in both La condición social de la mujer en España (1919) and La mujer ante las cortes constituyentes (1931). In the process, this critical interpretation will illuminate crucial components of the two women with whom Luis interacts: his wife Salud, and the free-

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171 For example, Johnson views Luis as being “forced to marry,” and “imprisoned by boring office work and moral emptiness from which there is no escape (Gender and Nation 248-49); Mangini similarly classifies Luis as a victim, but hints at the complex nuances behind this interpretation, noting that the novel is “de los pocos casos de literatura ‘feminista’ donde el hombre es destacado como víctima de las leyes ‘matriarciales’, podríamos decir. (“El papel 173); Ena Bordonada suggests that Nelken presents Luis as an “hombre como víctima de la dictadura impuesta por la mujer en el matrimonio,” however her analysis does go on to acknowledge that Salud suffers as well, and thus Luis is not the only victim in the novel (64).
thinking _mujer moderna_ Libertad. These women are also victims within the patriarchal systems depicted in the novel (namely, the institution of marriage and the capitalist economy). Like Luis, both Salud and Libertad find themselves caught in a _trampa_ – trapped amidst the contradictions of an increasingly modern society insistent upon maintaining antiquated social and moral codes. Through an exploration of these female characters’ views on marriage and motherhood, in conjunction with Nelken’s essayistic critiques of bourgeois marriage practices and the cultural “norms” surrounding maternity in her essays, this essay will show how _La trampa del arenal_ makes palpable the way in which both women and men are debilitated by a Spanish culture that remains suspicious of the growing women’s rights movement and its so-called “radical” feminist propositions.

The plot of _La trampa del arenal_ is relatively straightforward. Readers follow the downward path of Luis, the young male protagonist from a traditional, respectable bourgeois family in rural Spain. Luis arrives in Madrid to study, having grown up in the rural town of Peñaluz. However he is soon distracted, and becomes enamored with Salud, a woman of little means from Madrid’s _barrios castizos_. Upon learning that Salud is pregnant, the two young lovers decide to marry – much to the dismay of Luis’s disappointed bourgeois family in Peñaluz, and to the delight of Salud’s mother from the Madrid _barrios_. After a brief honeymoon period, Luis becomes increasingly irritated by the demands of his new life: he abandons his studies; he loathes his newfound, monotonous office job (and is eventually fired); he is disgusted by his wife’s preoccupation with social status and material wealth; and he is overwhelmed by the economic demands placed on him as the sole breadwinner for his

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172 Ena Bordonada points out that Peñaluz functions as the rural “_locus amoenus_ tanto en el aspecto material como en el espiritual”, in opposition to the critiqued urban space of Madrid (56).

173 Regarding the class distinctions portrayed in the novel vis-à-vis Luis and Salud, Mangini notes that novel is “una obra muy madrileña y costumbrista; el lenguaje, la toponimia, y los hábitos son específicamente de los barrios castizos de la corte” (“El papel” 173).
family. When the young, single vecinita Libertad moves into the apartment across from the couple, Luis develops an intimate but platonic friendship with her that leads him to consider leaving his own family. In the end, both women reveal startling news to Luis: Libertad is moving away to Paris, and Salud is expecting the couple’s second child. Throughout the novel, Luis’s downward trajectory is portrayed as a sort of suffocation, specifically a type of figurative drowning (with various forms of the verb *ahogar*). This process culminates with the vivid, literary crystallization of the title phrase in the closing chapter, as Luis envisions himself caught in a sand-trap, an image he recalls from a macabre photo in his father’s office.

In narrating Luis’s struggles, Nelken negatively portrays the significant milestones in his life as a way of denouncing several Spanish customs and traditions. Mangini rightly notes the critique of “la costumbre al uso para atrapar a un joven burgués en un matrimonio con alguien de la clase proletaria” (“El papel” 173); however, her reading does not directly challenge those which position Salud as the driving oppressive force behind this so-called seduction. In a broader critique, Cruz-Cámara suggests that Nelken ridicules the values of

174 This marks yet another formal similarity between Burgos’s *La rampa* and Nelken’s *La trampa del arenal*. Both portray protagonists who are ultimately on a futile, downward path towards despair. In the former, Isabel descends, slides, and falls to the bottom the metaphorical “ramp,” while in the latter Luis is stifled, suffocated and drowned in an equally metaphorical “sand trap.”

175 The closing paragraphs of *La trampa del arenal* explains the significance of the drowning sensation experienced by Luis: “Se sentía el pecho oprimido, con una sensación de ahogo que le subía hasta la garganta. Y esta sensación trajo a su memoria el recuerdo de un antiguo grabado francés que colgaba en el despacho de su padre, y que había obsesionado a toda su infancia. Representaba los arenales del monte San Miguel […] En el primer término aparecía un hombre, del cual divisabase tan sólo la cabeza y los brazos, pues estaba enterrado hasta el cuello en la arena. Y era una cosa pavorosa el ver el gesto de ese hombre, que se comprendía luchaba sobrehumanamente por salvarse de la arena en la cual se iba hundiendo poco a poco, con sus ojos fuera de las órbitas, su boca desencajada por los gritos de espanto, y sus brazos agitados en vano en demanda de un auxilio que no había de llegar” (213).

176 The title of the third chapter detailing the evolution of Salud’s and Luis’s relationship, “Seducción,” is laced with ambiguity and irony which allows for a dual-interpretation. A traditional understanding of seduction generally rests on the idea of *donjuanismo*, in which a man takes advantage of an unsuspecting woman, gains her trust, and then abandons her, perhaps even leaving her pregnant (Nelken criticizes this precise form of “donjuanismo” in *La condición social* (134-46). Nelken denounced this practice, and the lack of accountability on the part of the male seducer, in both *La condición social* and *La mujer ante las cortes constituyentes* (60).
bourgeois marriage by grotesquely deforming them – “hasta el punto del esperpento” (11). Cruz-Cámara, much like Ena Bordonada, is one of the few critics who has incorporated into her analyses the nuanced positions of the women within this text. Yet despite her conclusion that “la esperpentización” is one of the literary strategies that Nelken uses in order to destroy (“matar”) the ideology of the ángel del hogar (21), she does not center her analysis on the female characters themselves. Instead, her reading interprets both Salud and Libertad based on how they influence or affect the main male protagonist. A feminist interpretation of the novel, in my estimation, must begin from a point of departure that addresses these female individuals and their functions within both the criticized bourgeois marriage and the platonic friendship.

First, given that the majority of scholarship dealing with the novel has been inclined to disregard the challenges facing Salud as a young wife and mother, it is necessary to more profoundly analyze her role. Doing so will further dispel accusations of misogyny whilst demonstrating that this female character is much more innocent than the male protagonist (and even some critics) may prefer to believe. From the beginning, Nelken paints a very particular portrait of Salud: “era una de esas muchachas madrileñas, ni francamente artesanas ni burguesas, que dan, a quien las ve por la calle, la ilusión de una posible y fácil elevación en la escala social” (87). In fact, the author dedicates the entire second chapter titled “Salud” to the detailed description of her appearance, interests, daily activities and family relations.

But in La trampa del arenal, the “seducción” is ambiguous, “no sabía a punto fijo quién era el seducido” (86). Nevertheless, given that the narration is focalized predominantly through Luis, the narrator implies that it is was he who was seduced – tricked by the scheme of a woman: “Luis recordó su matrimonio, el enchantage de la seducción para pescar una posición social decorosa…” (169). Yet despite the fact that that Luis is cast as the “burlado” in this interaction, a close reading of the text indeed reveals that this male protagonist had not behaved so innocently himself. From the beginning, Luis pursues Salud with the hopes of finding an “amorío fácil y sin consecuencia,” (97), waiting for her after work each day, “procurando hipnotizarla con el ardor de su mirada juvenil” (96). In my estimation, the ambiguity further supports an alternative reading to the novel which foregoes positioning the man as the sole moral victim.
Readers learn that not only does Salud fixate on material wealth while aspiring to one day ascend the social ladder, but she is also embarrassed of, and attempts to hide, her own lowly origins: “conservaba Salud… una aversión inquebrantable por todo lo que olía a pueblo” (88). Rather than repeat the fate of her mother and other female relatives, Salud aspires to procure a bourgeois lifestyle.\textsuperscript{177} When she is old enough to work and contribute to the family income, she has but one criterion: “no quiso saber nada de oficios plebeyos, y prefirió entrar de dependienta en un comercio de papelería, en donde gana menos que en un obrador, pero en donde era llamada señorita por la clientela, y tenía trato con personas educadas” (89).

Readers are informed that Salud “esperaba algo, un algo que no sabía exactamente en qué había de consistir, pero que sentía sería una liberación definitiva de todo lo que la rodeaba” (90). She rejects the men her mother chooses for her, and instead focuses on securing a husband from the wealthier, more respectable, bourgeois class to which she aspires to belong. In the process, the narrator explains that Salud employs a sort of “cálculo frío” (91). She imagines her future as a picture-perfect portrait of a traditional bourgeois marriage: “como el cuadro que había de encerrar la síntesis de todas sus aspiraciones, a una Salud elegante… apoyada en el brazo de un marido, no menos apuesto, precedidos los dos por una criadita… que llevaba en brazos a un infante” (108). Salud aspires to embody the ángel del hogar within this formulation of the ideal bourgeois union, a notion perpetuated by a variety of

\textsuperscript{177} Salud’s mother, Doña Ascención, is perhaps the most grotesquely portrayed character in the novel: “…de jamona todavía apetitosa, había convertido en pocos años en un montón informe de grasas mal aseadas” (89). Furthermore, Doña Ascención’s disreputable lifestyle after her husband’s death had been entirely dependent on a “padrino que venía a visitar… regularmente dos veces por semana” (88). The narrator also explains that Salud “pensaba que no parecía hija de su madre, a quien no perdonaba el rápido descenso de los últimos años” (91). Nevertheless, Salud insists on naming her child after her mother. While Luis does not argue, he soon begins to resent his wife for giving the child this name, fearing that his daughter would be destined to relive “toda la bajeza de su suegra” (102). Salud’s mother is not the only woman in her family to live a life of misfortune. Her cousin, Celes, is described as a formerly attractive and stylish woman, now unhappily married, “aperreada con un enjambre de chicos, siempre sucios y enfermos, y con un marido que le daba lo justo para ir mal comiendo” (89). Salud’s brother Felipe is a “sinvergüenza” who steals money from his own mother when he lacks a mistress to provide for him (89).
popular nineteenth-century literature directed at women (including feminine magazines, conduct manuals, novels, and studies like María del Pilar Sinués’s *El ángel del hogar* (1859), as well as by the aforementioned *La perfecta casada*, which enjoyed a resurgence in the early twentieth-century (Jagoe and Enríquez 23-24). For a woman like Salud, marriage represents the only accessible means by which she may improve her current lifestyle and social standing.

It is true, then, that Salud is portrayed as social-climber, a fact further elucidated by the narrator’s language when describing her early interactions with Luis: “seducción” (92); “hizo tácitamente las paces” (96); “entrevista” (96); “esquivez” (97). The narrator’s repeated use of the language of seduction implies that Salud’s pregnancy was deliberate. While there is not sufficient evidence within the narrative to prove or disprove this theory, we might conclude that a deliberate pregnancy would have indeed meant that *motherhood*—even more so than marriage—provided Sauld with the means to escape her former lifestyle and secure an economically stable future. Yet rather than focus on what Salud does and how she behaves, it is more revelatory to ask *why* she acts in this way? What does this behavior reveal about the existing appropriate gender roles and social structures? Considered in this light, the figure of Salud indeed illuminates many of Nelken’s points regarding the crucial economic concerns which should propel the feminist movement in Spain. In *La condición social*, for

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178 These publications defined the model, respectable bourgeois woman as a wife and mother who would act in a saintly manner, educate her children, and make the home a pleasing space for her husband (Jagoe and Enríquez 23-24). According to Jagoe and Enríquez, the majority of these literary discourses declared that “las ocupaciones apropiadas para la mujer – su ‘misión’, en el lenguaje de la época – son el matrimonio, la maternidad y la domesticidad. A este respecto, los autores se inscriben dentro de una larga tradición de recomendaciones patriarcales para que las actividades de la mujer se limitasen a las esfera de la casa y la reproducción” (24). Female writers sponsored by Isabel II produced moralizing conduct manuals that further reinforced the traditional, domestic role that Catholic ideology prescribed for women. For example, María del Pilar Sinués de Marco’s lengthy study, *El ángel del hogar* (1859), repeatedly emphasizes that a woman’s duties to her husband and children in the private sphere should be prioritized over any of her own personal interests or desires. Sinués even places women’s literature in this context: “la literatura de la mujer debe servir únicamente para educar a sus hijos y embellecer el hogar doméstico” (I: 134).
example, Nelken describes the complex view of marriage that a Spanish woman like Salud—lacking material wealth, education, and labor skills—might have:

La mujer sin fortuna y sin medios de ganarse la vida conforme a sus necesidades, ha de considerar fatalmente el matrimonio como una salvación, como un refugio contra la implacable lucha por el sustento. En algunos países, el matrimonio es a menudo degradado por la codicia del hombre en busca de una buena dote; aquí por lo general, el matrimonio burgués se envilece desde un principio por culpa de la mujer que se vende legítimamente con no menos astucia, y a veces hasta con no mayor hipocresía, que cualquier ramera. (51, my emphasis)

This description is jarring for the way in which Nelken draws precise parallels between a prostitute and a woman seeking a marriage partner with a respectable name and secure income. Yet historically, Scanlon corroborates this notion with similar language, but her objective critique of Spanish society at this time omits an explicit link between marriage and prostitution:

[E]l matrimonio seguía siendo un premio que había que conseguir a cualquier precio, donde el valor de una mujer todavía dependía en gran medida no de sus propios méritos, sino de los de su marido, y donde todavía eran muy limitadas las posibilidades de que ella ganara lo suficiente para vivir con desahogo. (148)

In her essays, however, Nelken makes certain to exonerate the woman from blame in these circumstances: “¿Culpa de la mujer? ¿De su naturaleza? De ningún modo, o, por lo menos, nada autoriza esta suposición. La culpa corresponde por entero a la educación dada a
las muchachas” (*La condición social* 51). She instead locates the problema in the socio-cultural environment surrounding these women: “La culpa, pues, en éste como en los demás problemas de nuestro feminismo, debe achacarse no a las mujeres en sí, sino al ambiente de que son rodeadas. Todo estriba en la falta de preparación de la mujer a la vida, y en la falta de respeto para con la personalidad femenina” (232). By following Nelken’s sympathetic logic for women with limited economic means and education, as well as her well-documented compassion for prostitutes, we should not consider the aforementioned parallel (married woman – *ramera*) to be indicative of a malicious insult, or even a total condemnation of behavior. On the contrary, this comparison is quite effective in highlighting the way in which feminist reforms might benefit women of varied social classes. In *La trampa del arenal*, Salud is simply one of many economically unstable and insufficiently educated women, who attempts to ensure her future survival in Madrid – a city Burgos has

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179 In *En torno a nosotras*, Nelken’s more conservative feminist voice, represented by Isabel, observes the same comparison between married women and prostitutes, noting that not only are both economically dependent on men, but that these same men have the power to define their female *compañera*’s social status and reputation: “Al fin y al cabo, considerándola desde el punto de vista del pudor estricto, lo mismo da ella [la casada] que la *ramera*; su conducta, para consigo misma, si en verdad no tiene alma de *ramera*, ha de resultarle infinitamente más grave que a aquélla, o sea más impúdica. La diferencia no es ella quien la establece, sino el hombre, que la recompensa más definitivamente que a su *compañera* de una hora” (127).

180 Chapter VIII of *La condición social de la mujer en España* is entirely dedicated to “La prostitución” (127-43). In this chapter, Nelken advocates a new perspective on prostitution, viewing it as a social ill that should not be considered a punishable crime, but rather a misfortune (“desgracia”) to be avoided and remedied (141-42). She believes that prostitution is an embarrassment to the nation– not because of the prostitutes themselves – but due to the whole of society that is socially responsible and culpable for allowing the practice to continue (143). She recommends seven steps towards reform: 1. that individuals involved in reforms be specifically trained; 2. that convents and sites of reclusion be substituted for “casas de educación”; 3. that parents who sell children into prostitution lose their parental rights; 4. that traffickers of minors be severely punished; 5. that women be made aware of free lawyers who can advise them; 6. that all institutions be obligated to help both single and married women; and 7. that improvements be made hygiene and security services (142). Nelken’s approach to the issue is one in which the veil of silence surrounding prostitution is lifted, hence her inclusion of prostitutes – “ex-mujeres… al margen de la vida” – in her essay on the social condition of Spanish women (131). Nelken maintains this opinion and again advocates these provisions in *La mujer ante las cortes constituyentes*, though she simplifies her campaign by pointing to three main points on which new legislation should be established: “1. Es preciso, no corregir, sino “evitar;” 2. La prostitución de un país se halla directamente relacionada con las condiciones del trabajo de la mujer en este país, y con la protección legal dispensada a las madres solteras; 3. La prostitución de un país, antes que para las mismas que la practican, es vergüenza para todo el país socialmente culpable y responsable” (105-06).
already shown us to be especially cruel and unforgiving to women in *La rampa*. With these considerations in mind, Salud cannot be judged as solely, or inherently culpable for the tragic tone of the narrative.

Cristine Delphy, a materialist feminist in the Marxist tradition, can elucidate the complications which arise for women like Salud in societies that privilege marriage and motherhood and simultaneously discourage (or at least do not promote) women’s higher education and preparation for careers in the public sphere. Delphy acknowledges that women’s position in the labor market has been well-studied, however, her originality within this field has been to “invert the direction of links usually established,” by theorizing the following:

> [W]hile ordinarily it is seen as “the family situation” which influences the capacity of women to work “outside,” I have tried to show that the situation created for women in the labour market itself constitutes an objective incentive to marry, and hence that that labour market plays a role in the exploitation of their domestic work. (20)

In early twentieth-century Spain, Scanlon has observed a similar predicament: “Aparte del matrimonio (o de meterse monja), la única otra actividad que se le permitía a una mujer de clase media era la filantropía, y muchas mujeres que estaban insatisfechas con su forzosa

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181 *La trampa del arenal* also focuses on the difficulty of surviving in a growing, modern city, though Nelken’s socialist politics inform a more general, genderless critique: “Las ciudades grandes son muy duras para el pobre y para el que se encuentra solo” (172).

182 Nash (*Mujer, familia y trabajo*) and Capel Martínez (*El trabajo* and “Life and Work”) are among the historians of Spanish culture who have specifically studied the history of Spanish women’s work, and women’s inclusion in (and/or exclusion from) the labor market and the wage economy. Scanlon has also documented women’s work, discussing middle class professions, working class occupations and prostitution (58-121). Scanlon makes specific mention of the fact that, in the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, women were still educated for the “profession,” or the “career” of marriage, and that should they work outside the home upon marrying, it was considered a “deshonra… [que] no sólo se humillaba ella, sino también su marido” (58-59).
inactividad encontraban una salida para sus energías en las obras caritativas” (62, emphasis mine).\textsuperscript{183} Thus, while it is true that opportunities for women to work outside the home existed in some capacity, they were generally neither lucrative nor intellectually rewarding. Nelken critiqued this system of exploitation, noting that the majority of women who worked in low-paying jobs or performed charitable labor for zero remuneration, were not exclusively dependent on their trivial monetary earnings. In \textit{La trampa del arenal}, for example, Salud views her low-paying job as a clerk as a mere temporary occupation which will allow her to supplement her family’s income until she marries. Marriage is in fact her ultimate “career” goal. Nelken observed that it was precisely women’s willingness to participate in this system (perhaps to remedy the “forzosa inactividad” that Scanlon observes, or due to lack of alternatives) contributed to continued exploitation of female labor and the subsequent loss of value attributed to the services that women performed in both domestic and public spaces.

Correspondingly, within the domestic sphere, women were also expected to perform duties for which they were often insufficiently educated or prepared. Delphy reminds us that “raising children requires work… [and] this work is extorted from women” (21). The concept of “extorting” women’s labor – both within the private and public spheres – is in fact crucial to Nelken’s feminist project. From a feminist perspective, the most women-centered event in the narrative is the scene in which Salud gives birth to Luis’ daughter. Yet Nelken maintains the omniscient narrator, and the experience is focalized through Luis. Carol H. Poston has studied the (relatively few) accounts of childbirth appearing in literature, concluding that the most common narrative style is that in which the birth is recounted “from the audience rather than the participant point of view” (Poston 20-21). Indeed, when Salud gives birth to her

\textsuperscript{183} Scanlon also notes that theater was an acceptable profession for middle-class women, as it did not threaten professional opportunities for men (65). This was certainly neither a stable, nor a lucrative career, nor was it entirely practical for many women.
daughter, Nelken’s omniscient narrator concentrates on the impact – or lack thereof – that the birth has on Luis as a young husband:

Luis era demasiado joven para sentir su paternidad […] con sus 22 años despreocupados, le quedó tan sólo la impresión inborrable de un acto repugnante, de una mujer desfigurada por las gesticulaciones del dolor; y hubo de hacer un gran esfuerzo sobre sí mismo para besar a esa criatura que acababa de ver salir al mundo entre un montón de inmundicias, con la cara violácea por la casi estrangulación que la infligían las vueltas al cuello del cordón umbilical. (109)

The harsh language is reminiscent of naturalist accounts of childbirth (namely in Zola), yet does not fall neatly into either of the two traditions that Poston has identified in accounts of childbirth in literature. The first is the “heroine tradition,” in which the birth constitutes the woman’s highest, most noble moment; the second is the “savage tradition” (into which Poston places Zola) in which the woman is portrayed animalistically (21-22).

Nelken’s description in *La trampa del arenal* straddles the boundaries of these two trends, sharing the “language of revulsion” and the allusions to “horror” that Poston identifies in the savage tradition (22), but without diminishing the woman to a mere beast. Prior to the narration of the birth, the “heroine tradition” is visible, as the narrator explains that, for Salud, her daughter is “la consagración” (107). In the narrative, the narrator’s two-fold critique of her fortuitous entrance into motherhood promptly overshadows any semblance of authentic admiration for Salud’s attempts at maternal devotion. First, emphasis is placed on her obsession with material wealth and status: “Este paseo del matrimonio burgués ostentando de su legitimidad y la de su prole, parecía el *nec plus ultra* del asiento en la vida
y de la respetabilidad” (107). Secondly, a sarcastic tone imbues the repetitive descriptions of this young mother: “Salud era una buenísima madre… una madre ‘como hay pocas’” (107-08).184 Nelken had identified a similarly troubling comportment in young Spanish women in “Maternología y puericultura,” a key chapter of La condición social which was republished in 1926. She laments the fact that many women who marry are more prepared to decorate their homes and please their husbands, than they are to carry out their ensuing maternal duties: “llegan al matrimonio y a la maternidad… no sabiendo… nada de lo que serán sus deberes y de la responsabilidad que asumen al aceptarlos” (“Maternología” 9-10). For Nelken, the naivety with which many women entered marriage was critical to understanding the way in which they might easily become victims within the purportedly idyllic nuclear family which continued to be valued and promoted by traditional, conservative values. Salud, we learn, is in fact quite unprepared for the new responsibilities of motherhood, just as Luis is likewise ignorant of the demands of fatherhood. By portraying the divide between a father who perceives the birth as a grotesque, even savage event, and a mother who problematically is expected to experience it as the fulfillment of her life’s aspirations (and only does so in terms of status and appearances, in this case), Nelken alludes to the complicated parental dialectic that exists from the very first moments of a child’s existence. Even more, through the narrative’s demonstration of the father’s (Luis’s) startling lack of psychological comprehension, La trampa del arenal foregrounds women’s often invisible labor in childbirth –and by extension all labor within the domestic space.

184 Cruz-Cámara has identified these descriptions of Salud (in relation to her maternal role) as being laden with “una clara intención irónica” which she believes serves to buttress Nelken’s overall agenda within this chapter: to make maternity, one of the pillars of the ángel del hogar ideology, the object of satire; to deform the concept of maternity as an ideal (11-12).
Finally, as the narrative progresses and the thoughts of Luis’s conscience are unveiled, it becomes clear to readers that he does not, in fact, love Salud. He even tries to convince himself that she is unfaithful to him, solely so that he may have a justifiable excuse to leave her and their child: “…su autosugestión habíale casi convencido de la infidelidad de su mujer. *Tenía que ser.* Empezó entonces una existencia folletinesca… en que todos los ratos libres de Luis… fueron dedicados a una actividad detectivesca” (180). Despite his best efforts, Salud is “demasiado sencilla y transparente para ocultar en su fondo nada pecaminoso” (180). Interestingly enough, Luis even laments the fact that she is indeed a good, honorable wife: “Hubo de convencerse dolorosamente de que *había mujeres de quienes era efectivamente una desgracia el tener que reconocer que no eran malas.* No obstante, no perdía la esperanza. Estaba seguro de que algo habría de salvarle indefectiblemente” (181, my emphasis).185 Here, in the final chapters of the novel, not only does the narrator makes clear that Salud is *not* an inherently bad or conniving woman, but also subtly presents her as a moral victim of an emotionally distant, often absent, husband.

A feminist approach to this novel, in my estimation, must take into account Salud’s personal situation as an individual woman, rather than merely categorize her as an accessory to a male protagonist’s decline. With this approach, Salud emerges as clearly uneducated and unskilled, ingenuous housewife; she believes she has found a husband to care for and support her, while she attempts to perform her duties as the bourgeois *ángel del hogar* – giving birth to children and abstaining from wage labor in the public sphere – just as the traditional

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185 This sentiment is foreshadowed a few pages earlier, as Luis and his co-workers discuss the situation of Jardines, their middle-aged co-worker who feels trapped in a marriage with a wife he does not love, with an ever increasingly family. His negative disposition is provoked largely “por la prolificencia de su mujer, que le obsequiaba invariablemente cada año con otro retoño” (142). Luis contemplates Jardines’s situation, comparing it to his own, and his observation suggests even when a woman would fulfill her role as the *ángel del hogar*, her work and sacrifice were frequently overlooked and undervalued by a husband who spends his days entirely outside the home: “Sí, era verdad: había veces en que lo peor era que una mujer fuese honrada” (179).
paradigm instructs. In reality, however, Salud’s spouse is secretly forming an increasingly intimate friendship with another woman (Libertad), confessing to the latter that he does not love his wife, and even plotting to send her – and their child – away from the city to live with his mother in Peñaluz:

¿Qué le importa a usted [Libertad] alguien a quien no quiero, que no me quiere, a quien sólo me legan unas cadenas? … Usted no puede creer que, dadas las relaciones que yo tengo con mi mujer, tenga yo para con ella más obligación que la de ampararlas materialmente, a ella y a la niña… Pues, ya verá como todo se arregla, Libertad. Se irán con mi madre, y yo seré sólo de usted, ya lo verá. (198)

By focusing on Salud, not only are readers privy to her lack of education and naïveté, but they come to understand that Luis is immature, behaves erratically, and possesses an equally deceptive streak when it comes to intimate personal relationships, specifically marriage.

This alternative characterization of Luis is only accentuated upon considering his interactions with Libertad from a point of view that similarly positions the woman as the subject of the interaction, rather than as the accessory. Libertad is a curious character in the novel. In general, critics agree that she operates in opposition to Salud – as the mujer moderna to Salud’s ángel del hogar. Mangini has even suggested that she functions as the author’s alter-ego, given that she reflects and expresses many of the theories Nelken puts

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186 Borrachero has suggested that Salud conforms to the female character prototypes created by the novelists of the Generation of ’98, while Libertad represents Nelken’s proposed new model of womanhood: “Libertad no encuentra parangón, como es de esperar, entre los personajes femeninos de los escritores de la Generación del 98, a excepción de la Lulú barojiana de El árbol de la ciencia (1911) […] Lulú es, para Andrés Hurtado, protagonista masculino, un enigma absoluto, como lo es Libertad para Luis” (23). Borrachero notes, however, that in Baroja’s novel this “new woman” must die, whereas in Nelken’s La trampa, Libertad’s future is open to a variety of possibilities – thus, she may even be interpreted as a female incarnation of the tired male protagonists of male-authored novels like Unamuno’s Niebla, Baroja’s El árbol de la ciencia and Azorín’s La voluntad (24-26).
forth in *La condición social* (Mangini “El papel” 173-74). Luis (and readers) gradually learn that she is educated, lives alone, has no parents or close relatives, and supports herself through her work as a translator. This *mujer moderna* takes pride in having worked, even as a young girl, a fact that further distinguishes her from the models of womanhood which Luis had known: “Luis no se había imaginado jamás que pudiera existir una mujer así, tan distinta de Salud, de sus hermanas” (169). Yet despite her modernity, Libertad possesses a salient trait which demonstrates the complexities of feminist redefinitions of gender roles in Spain: Libertad desires to become a mother. She even confesses her regret that she did not have a child in her previous relationship, despite never having married.

For motherhood to factor heavily upon the psychological construction of a *mujer moderna* prototype certainly reveals a specificity to feminism in the Spanish context. We must recall that historians have observed this intriguing characteristic in the transforming female archetypes of early twentieth century Spain. Mary Nash, for example, notes that despite the change in the cultural representations and images of woman (from “Ángel del Hogar” or “Perfecta Casada” to “Mujer Nueva” or “Mujer Moderna”), “el nuevo prototipo de feminidad – la ‘Mujer Moderna’ – mantenía intacto uno de los ejes constitutivos del discurso tradicional de la domesticidad al asentar la maternidad como base esencial de la identidad cultural de la mujer” (“Maternidad” 687-88). Nelken indeed espoused this maternal aspect

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187 Mangini affirms unequivocally: “Pero más importante que su función en la trama es el papel de Libertad como el alter ego de Margarita Nelken” (“El papel” 173-74).
188 The narrator describes Libertad as “huérfana, sin parientes próximos, vivía de su trabajo, haciendo traducciones, y vivía muy modestamente, pero dueña en absoluto de sus hechos” (162).
189 Libertad explains her work ethic and her autodidactic education: “Trabajé donde pude y como pude; pero sin quererme acostumbrar, y eso me ha salvado. De noche leía, aprendía” (172).
190 Nash explains that the association between women and maternity was barely weakened, and never rejected, even as various aspects of the Spanish culture, economy and politics began to modernize: “Ni siquiera el proceso de modernización económica, cultural y política en las primeras décadas del siglo XX que conllevó una reformulación modernizadora de un nuevo prototipo femenino – la “Mujer Nueva” o “Mujer Moderna” –
of female identity, though she did not feel that this emphasis on motherhood should eclipse a woman’s individuality nor confine her exclusively to the private sphere of the home. Quite the contrary, with adequate social structures, Nelken believed that women were capable of much more, even taking on what Delgado-Larios has referred to as a “triple-role” which would enable them to challenge, or perhaps obscure, the dichotomous divide between the public and private spheres in Spanish society:

Pour éviter que la maternité devienne un fardeau, elle [Nelken] prône une approche nouvelle, sociale, ce qui veut dire sortir la maternité du domaine privé du libéralisme, pour la placer dans la sphère publique: crèches sur les lieux de travail, horaires aménagés (la ‘semaine anglaise’). La femme du futur serait un être véritablement accompli grâce à l’éducation, qui lui ouvrirait des horizons nouveaux, mais sans renoncer à sa singularité. Il convient de rappeler qu’à cette époque, ni les idéologies révolutionnaires ni les pratiques syndicales n’ont proposé des solutions pour améliorer le statut des femmes dans leur triple rôle d’épouses, de mères et de travailleuses. (Delgado-Larios 6)

Clearly, this third aspect of women’s new cultural identity would rely heavily on their increased participation in the public labor force, a core component of the agendas of individuals, like Nelken, who promoted socialist politics: “Los militantes del Partido Socialista […] intentaron convencer a las mujeres de que el trabajo, lejos de ser una actividad vergonzosa, era una obligación que incumbía a todo el mundo, varón o hembra” (Scanlon 79). To achieve this goal, urgent labor reforms were needed in order for women to obtain

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cambié el eje constitutivo del discurso tradicional de domesticidad ya que la maternidad seguía representando la base esencial de la identidad cultural femenina” (“Experiencia” 162).
non-exploitative positions, and Nelken placed herself at the fore of the fight for new regulations favoring the female worker.\textsuperscript{191} She argued for childcare services at factories and manageable working hours that included two guaranteed days off each week. Nevertheless, in the Madrid of \textit{La trampa del arenal}, readers observe that even a working-class, free-thinking woman like Libertad perceives the roles of wife and mother as mutually dependent, and the roles of educated, working woman and mother as mutually exclusive. That is, in order to have a child, Libertad senses that in reality, she must choose to marry and enter a traditional familiar unit, thus sacrificing her employment and corresponding independent lifestyle.

Nelken’s Libertad brings to life the multi-faceted nature of the “maternal dilemma” facing modern Spanish women. Most pertinent to the depiction of Libertad’s dilemma, however, is the fact that, despite her education, her extensive travel, and her job as a translator, this young, modern woman nevertheless \textit{desires} to have a child: “Si tuviera un hijo, un hijo que fuese \textit{sólo mío}, me parece que tendría fuerzas para arrostrarlo todo el mundo” (169). Luis, as a spokesman for traditional, patriarchal values, however, reminds her that were she to have a child she would have no choice but to commit herself to her child’s father. Libertad vehemently rejects this notion that she uphold a mere \textit{status quo}: “Yo no sé hacer comedias, y comedias sería, con hijo o sin él, vivir con un hombre al que no me ligase ni amor ni estima” (168). When Luis continues to pressure her, reminding her of the ever-present ¿qué dirán?, she remains adamant. Rejecting the expectation that she (or any woman) should worry about the opinions of others, she deliberately points out this same society’s hypocritical attitudes towards mothers: “¿Esa gente que le vuelve la espalda a la

\textsuperscript{191} Nelken played an important role in leading the first strike of female workers in the Madrid tobacco factory (Martínez, \textit{Exiliadas} 63), and she repeatedly praises the \textit{cigarreras} of the Madrid factory for their insistence on non-exploitative working conditions.
madre sola, y admite toda vileza con tal que haya un pabellón legal para cubrir el contrabando? Yo, con mi hijo, no necesitaría de esa gente que, por mucho que me despreciara, no me despreciaría nunca tanto como yo a ella” (168-69). She reiterates this sentiment later in the novel: “Para mí no existen prejuicios ni leyes convencionales” (197). Libertad’s comments echo the words of the author, and of other Spanish feminists like Burgos, who fought for fair treatment and support systems for all mothers, despite their marital status. Nelken’s stance, in my estimation, is more radical than Burgos’, given that the latter advocated on behalf of single mothers who were often unfortunate victims of male-authored seduction, abandonment, or prostitution, while the former extends her defense to women who might independently choose to be single mothers, even suggesting that this should be a viable and acceptable option for working women. Choice is a prominent feature in Nelken’s discourse on motherhood, and she embraces maternal choice in positive terms: as a proactive decision in which a woman (especially a married woman) voluntarily and willingly elects to have a child.

In La trampa del arenal, Nelken imbues her symbolically-named mujer moderna with key traits which suggest her capacity for independent, freely chosen motherhood. For example, one of the first times that Libertad appears in the novel, she is interacting with Luis’s and Salud’s young daughter when the child is with the nanny. She talks with the girl,

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192 Again, it is worth recalling that Nelken was a single mother (before the law) for over ten years before marrying the father of her second child, therefore her personal circumstances likely influenced the trajectory of her feminist thoughts on motherhood. Mangini has emphasized the importance of these biographic facts when considering Nelken’s arguments in “El papel de la mujer intelectual” (172).

193 Maternal choice in negative terms – that is, the conscious rejection of motherhood – was not apparent in Spain during the 1920s, nor in the literature produced by Burgos, Nelken, or Montseny (though Burgos’s Quiero vivir mi vida touches on the complications such a decision might provoke). As noted in my introduction, it was not until the thirties that a Spanish woman dared to reject motherhood as a marker of female identity (See Mary Nash’s article “Maternidad, maternología y reforma eugénica en España, 1900-1939,” in which she credits the anarchist Lucía Sánchez Saornil with being the first to openly reject the maternal role for its potential to subjugate women (697-98).
treats her to some candies, and invites her over to play with a doll. Despite the child’s positive responses and obvious delight, Salud reprimands the nanny for having allowed this interaction with the vecinita: “Le echó a la chica [niñera] un rapapolvo de primero, por ‘estúpida’. ¡Dejar a su hija con una cualquiera, con una mujer que ni siquiera llevaba nombre cristiano!” (147). Yet it is significant that Libertad does not – or cannot – practice what she preaches. Despite the fact that Libertad possesses these key qualities required of the ideal mother figure, the hypocritical bourgeois morale judges her as an “aberración femenina,” given her independent lifestyle and the fact that, though unmarried, she had nevertheless been sharing her apartment with a male partner prior to their separation (Cruz-Cámara 10). 194 Thus, if we consider Libertad to be Nelken’s apotheosis of a new modern woman, we must pay careful attention to the fact that she does not denounce traditional feminine values.

Johnson has studied the representations of the “new female self” in the work of Spanish feminist thinkers of the early twentieth century, concluding that the preferred model is actually theorized as “a hybrid of tradition and modernity (a fusion of past and present)” (Spanish Feminist Thought” 40). Libertad herself all but confirms Johnson’s observation when she explains the insignificance of the titles señora and señorita to an uncertain Luis: “Le diré que puede llamarme como quiera, porque soy a un tiempo las dos cosas […] Para usted y para todos los que serán como usted, soy señorita, puesto que no estoy casada. Para mí, soy señora, y como señora sé obligar a que se me respete” (141). As an amalgam of these traditional and modern values, Libertad does not adequately fit into the Spanish society.

194 Cruz-Cámara also reads Libertad as having the potential to fulfill not only maternal responsibilities, but also the duties of the “ideal” wife which the ángel del hogar paradigm prescribed: “El giro irónico que viene a coronar la desarticulación de la ideología del ángel del hogar que Nelken lleva a cabo reside en el hecho de que sea Libertad la que cumple ciertas funciones atribuidas a la esposa ideal del hombre burgués. Así, mientras que Salud es incapaz de ejercer una influencia benefactora sobre el alma de Luis, Libertad se convierte en una fuerza regeneradora” (13). This interpretation, though, ignores the situation of the woman as subject, and instead relegates her to a secondary role for the purpose of furthering a more critical analysis of the male protagonist.
depicted in the novel, where women like Salud judge her, and nostalgic, directionless men like Luis perceive her as a fascinating potential companion whose steadfast desire for independence will ensure she remains just out of their reach.\textsuperscript{195}

It is telling, then, that Libertad makes the choice to leave Spain at the end of the novel. Such an act implies that, despite her role as the “contrapunto de la esposa [Salud], la pretenciosa y artificial” Salud, Libertad is unable to find happiness in the Spanish capital. She is unable to embody Nelken’s imagined ideal modern woman in Spain, given that she refuses to accept a lifestyle that defines her identity purely in terms of her marital status, nor does she wish to sacrifice her job, or become Luis’s extra-marital amante. Delphy has critiqued this double-standard in determining social-class membership: “Feminist writers have drawn attention to […] the use of a double standard in determining social class membership. Occupation, the universal measure of an individual’s social class, is, in the case of women, and only of women, replaced by a completely different criterion – marriage” (29). She goes on to explain that women are actually judged by two criteria: occupation and marital status (30-31). In the Madrid depicted in \textit{La trampa del arenal}, Libertad and Salud are confined by strictures which narrowly define and limit their acceptable social roles. Libertad understands that motherhood is still contingent on marriage, and thus on the imposition of a border between the public and private spaces – and she refuses to confine herself to the domestic sphere. According to Nash, “El proceso de redefinición de lo público y lo privado es clave en la trayectoria de emancipación femenina” (Aprendizaje” 171). Yet in order for this redefinition to take place, a drastic renegotiation of the terms of marriage as a

\textsuperscript{195} Borrachero observes that the male protagonists in many of the canonical “novelas del 98” lack will and vital impulse (\textit{impulso `vital´, voluntad}), both of which are necessary for success in the modern world (24-25). Furthermore, this critic suggests that these directionless male protagonists often wander through the novels on a quest for self-improvement (hence the popularity of the \textit{bildungsroman}), yet they frequently encounter women like Salud, who hold them back (23).
gendered social contract was necessary. This type of adjustment, rather than an outright rejection of tradition or an iconoclastic prescription, is fundamental to Nelken’s feminist position.

As a final tactic in her critique of this divided social structure, Nelken reveals the shortcomings of determining access to the public or private sphere based on gender, as well as the way in which many character traits assigned to men and women are quite arbitrary, even entirely socially determined (rather than innate). Turning now to Luis, this protagonist is ultimately incapable and miserable in the public sphere, purportedly the natural domain of the husband as head of his family. Nelken demonstrates that, just as women often became veritable servants in the private sphere, so men could be burdened in the public sphere by the monotony of office work or factory jobs in which they often worked long hours and received paltry salaries. She reveals that neither men nor women in early twentieth-century Madrid are sufficiently prepared to carry out their so-called respective roles in such hemisect spaces. If we turn a critical eye on Luis’s behavior, it becomes evident that he brings much of his misfortune upon himself. This is a fact that has curiously been disregarded by many of the novel’s critics. His extreme lack of ambition reveals his plight to be much more complicated than that of a helpless victim, unjustly exploited by his surroundings (thus as a tragic anti-hero, he is immensely different in this respect from Burgos’ Isabel in La rampa). We must note that Luis in fact chooses to quit school; he abandons his job; he refuses to take a new, lower-paying position, despite the fact that he has no credentials for employment

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196 Nash agrees with my assessment that modification and negotiation formed the crux of Nelken’s argument for the reform of traditional gender roles (rather than a drastic re-writing, or re-creation), and her article employs the term “reajuste” to describe such a transition (“Aprendizaje” 172).

197 Nelken also takes up this issue in En torno a nosotras, where one of her female characters rejects the notion that men are free within the public sphere while women are slave within the home, noting that both endure a type of servitude (“servidumbre”) for the sake and well-being of their families (27-28).
opportunities which demand high qualifications. The narrator reveals that he lacks even the most basic motivation and willpower to make changes in his life: “Pero, al llevar a la práctica sus intenciones, faltábale el ánimo” (133). Clearly, he is unprepared for the demands of this modern city and his newfound familial responsibilities. For the first time, Luis is forced to confront a future in which he must fully exert himself, no longer able to rely on assistance from either his family or his aristocratic lineage. Thus while this new milieu certainly afforded the middle- and working-class with newfound opportunities, it also presented them with immense challenges that often worked against the sole male-breadwinner unaccustomed to the demands of the modern, capitalist environment. Were his wife able, or encouraged, to participate in the wage-garnering potential of the public sector in conjunction with her maternal responsibilities, Luis would likely be relieved of a portion of the burden placed upon him as the earner of the family’s sole income. Likewise, Salud would not be confined to the private sphere, performing monotonous domestic duties which neither suit, nor fulfill her.

Secondly, and most disconcerting from a feminist perspective, is the fact that Luis not only evades responsibility for his own actions, but he actually blames his failures on the women in his life – his mother, his sisters, his wife, and even his infant daughter. His hatred

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198 According to the narrator: “En todas partes le pidieron sus títulos… Y Luis sentía poco a poco sus energías para la lucha fundirse en el pesimismo despertado por un ambiente en que el valor personal no tiene significación propia, ni se cotiza sin padrinos” (203).
199 Having been born in to a family of noble lineage and aristocratic descent in rural Peñaluz, Luis’s parents have high hopes for their son, and are devastated upon learning that Salud is pregnant. Yet they continue to help him, despite their own increasing financial woes. His father’s connections in Madrid are one of the only means through which Luis is able to obtain employment in an office environment, rather than a factory, despite the fact that he has not completed his studies, and Luis frequently relied on his parents for financial assistance. With this support system gone, Luis promptly resigns himself to “un porvenir inevitable y fatalmente igual al de esos hombres que le rodeaban: trabajar toda la semana en un trabajo insulso, sin interés, noria a la que había que dar vueltas para conseguir un pasar sin comodidades materiales ni satisfacciones morales” (117).
200 Julia has identified this conflict in Madrid as a constantly evolving urban center: “Este crecimiento de la ciudad y la transformación de sus funciones provocó cambios importantes en su estructura social. Ante todo, aparece por vez primera una burguesía industrial media que ya no es, ni puede ser, ennoblecida” (146). Davies makes a similar observation: “traditional social hierarchies according to birth were challenged as social mobility became possible,” especially in the rapidly growing urban centers of Madrid and Barcelona during the first three decades of the twentieth century (Spanish Women’s Writing 99).
for Salud, largely based on her obsession with status and material goods, increases exponentially as the narrative progresses, thus blinding him to his own shortcomings: “A fuerza de ver en su mujer la razón inicial de sus desdichas” (145). He even goes as far as to blame his newborn daughter for his problems: “Y Luis, sin querérselo razonar, acumulaba en su fuero interno todos sus rencores sobre la niña, primera causa visible de la falta de armonía de su existencia” (110). His complete lack of respect for women even aggravates his own failures, given that he has been raised in a tradition that defines a wife, and woman in general, as a passive, submissive childbearer – and virtual servant to her husbands. His own mother epitomized these traditional values: “La bondad en ella había sido siempre, ante todo, esta sumisión al dominio del esposo que constituye la virtud cardinal de las mujeres de su raza” (150). Thus throughout his childhood and adolescent years, Luis was indoctrinated, if perhaps only passively, with the gendered ideology that equates woman with wife and mother: the submissive ángel del hogar. It is only Libertad whom he believes is worthy of his respect: “Era la primera vez en su vida que Luis se encontraba de este modo, sin traba alguna, con una mujer independiente que le gustaba y a la que sentía era necesario respetar” (163). With her, he feels a newfound sense of freedom and possibility, “aislado de todas sus decepciones: su madre… que no era la que él hubiera querido…, Salud…, hasta la niña, que era la barrera más fuerte levantada ante su porvenir” (156). But Luis does not view Libertad merely as a woman, but as a symbol. She represents his potential freedom, and he thus believes she is capable of saving him. Problematically, he does not attempt to save himself. In reality, this male protagonist is a failure of his own design. He has proven himself to be particularly incapable in the public sphere, where he has abused and subsequently lost the privileges he had been afforded as a male member of society, and which had been denied to
women. Without having previously known an independent woman like Libertad, Luis has grown to resent and disparage women, failing to see their valuable potential to live as equal partners among men.

Finally, as a way of renegotiating the terms of the gendered public and private spheres, Nelken makes it apparent that Luis is more than capable of performing domestic duties – the problem is that he does not believe he has responsibilities in this realm. Therein lies the crux of Nelken’s feminist position on motherhood: that women have been culturally conditioned to accept it as their natural, self-sacrificing duty, whilst men have simultaneously been conditioned to reject such “feminine” duties in the private sphere, given that they do not form part of the wage economy.\(^{201}\)

The narrator makes it obvious that this male protagonist (and by extension any young father) is disconnected from his parental responsibilities. He views his own child with detachment: “esa criaturita por quien no sentía gran cariño, pero que le infundía lástima, nacida de seres tan poco acordes” (110). It is not until months later, when his daughter becomes extremely sick and Salud is exhausted from keeping vigil by the child’s side, that Luis performs parental duties for the first time:

Luis quedó solo con su hija en brazos. Era la primera vez que la tenía en sus rodillas como una madre, y la primera vez que se encontraba tan solo con ella. Le pareció que era de él nada más, sintiéndose investido, por su dolor, de una paternidad inmaculada; e, informuladamente, profundamente, desde lo más recóndito de su ser, le pidió perdón por haberla traído a un mudo en donde todo es sufrimiento, hasta para los seres más inocentes. (186, my emphasis)

\(^{201}\) Delphy elaborates a similar theory regarding the economic forces behind this separation in her critical text, *Close to Home*. 
Upon finally dedicating this time to his daughter – and indirectly to his wife – Luis understands the magnitude of his previously careless behavior and the difficulties of parenting. The narrator paints a disturbing picture of Luis’s complete lack of comprehension prior to this time, as he recalls “ciertas ideas de liberación… desechadas al punto como monstruosas, pero cuya insistencia le había perseguido a pesar suyo” upon learning of his daughter’s extreme illness (187). Yet this sudden, albeit unexpected, participation in the domestic space as caregiver has a positive outcome, as Luis finally recognizes the extent of his parental responsibilities: “esa niña, por cuya conservación hubiera dado hasta el último gota de sangre, y sintió crecer en él, como una victoria, el amargo orgullo de su paternidad. Más que nunca, le parecía que su hija dependía de él únicamente” (187). Yet this sudden, albeit unexpected, participation in the domestic space as caregiver has a positive outcome, as Luis finally recognizes the extent of his parental responsibilities: “esa niña, por cuya conservación hubiera dado hasta el último gota de sangre, y sintió crecer en él, como una victoria, el amargo orgullo de su paternidad. Más que nunca, le parecía que su hija dependía de él únicamente” (187). Just as Luis is able to carry out those duties typically associated with women, so too are women like Libertad and Salud capable of functioning in the public sector if given the appropriate opportunities.

As a final critique of this male protagonist as he flounders both socially and professionally in Madrid, Nelken tinges Luis’s persona with elements of an implacable courtly lover as he becomes increasingly enamored with Libertad. His interior monologue patterns onto an extremely needy discourse of dependence, as “poco a poco, fatalmente, Libertad llegó a serle indispensable” (117). Mangini has suggested that “Libertad servirá para que Luis, sumido en la pobreza espiritual de su mujer y la familia de ella, pueda respirar el aire de honradez e integridad de la joven” (“El papel” 173-74). On a psychological level,

202 It is important to note that Nelken carefully crafts this male protagonist in such a way that readers will not wholly condemn his behavior. This, in my estimation, contributes to the tendency to sympathize with him as the defeated protagonist. For example, he does technically remain faithful to his wife, despite the fact that he imagines the possibility of an alternative future while spending considerable time with Libertad during the summer his wife and daughter spend in Peñaluz. He also admits that much of this unique, platonic relationship’s appeal is based on the fact that the possibilities are unknowable and, indeed, largely inaccessible: “Libertad adquiría el prestigio de lo inaccesible” (177). Luis believes he needs Libertad, yet he is not entirely sure why: “La necesitaba, no como había necesitado a los veinte años a la muchacha bonita cuya belleza deseaba, sino para vivir junto a ella, no sabía siquiera si carnal o fraternalmente. La necesitaba” (117).
this may be true, yet Luis is incapable of comportment on par with the maturity, integrity, and honor with which Libertad behaves. While critics have been inclined to see the frustrated potential relationship between Luis and Libertad as representative of an unobtainable ideal, I find it more appropriate to consider the severing of these ties as essential to Nelken’s feminist project and to her depiction of the *mujer moderna* in particular. With an analysis depending on Nelken’s essays then, Luis is most appropriately viewed as deficient counterpart: an incapable *hombre moderno* who lacks the ambition, education, and self-assuredness which might make him an appropriate companion for the *mujer moderna* he so desires, Libertad. In other words, the *mujer moderna* that Nelken envisions must await the evolution of the *hombre moderno*, as men like Luis are still unaccustomed to viewing women as their equals. We might surmise that Libertad will be much better off without a conventional, perpetually dissatisfied bourgeois companion, thus her decision not to restrict herself (through marriage or otherwise) to a man like Luis is a clear indication of her liberated nature. At the same time, both women in *La trampa del arenal*, however, are also victims, to some extent, of a social order that denies them the innumerous opportunities for self-improvement and self-realization which are afforded to men. By critiquing the relegation of women and motherhood to the private sphere and the subsequent exclusion of mothers from the public sphere (and conversely the corresponding inadequacy of paternal responsibility in the private sphere), *La trampa del arenal* illustrates the need for a dramatic rewriting of appropriate social roles for men and women which do not rely solely on narrow, biology-based interpretations of gender.

Yet a critical question remains: why would Nelken, a clearly feminist author, choose to center her narrative on a male protagonist, especially given that many of her
contemporaries were penning similar socially-minded, feminist novels featuring female protagonists and the overall female experience within these same social structures and institutions? Even more, why might she present him as a victim? I suggest that there are two primary reasons for the use of a male protagonist. First, as we have seen in *La condición social*, Nelken employs male theorists and sociologists (like John Stuart Mill and August Bebel) to back up her claims regarding the unfavorable social position of women and the possibilities for social reform. She explains: “En cuestiones de feminismo, una opinión masculina tiene doble valor, pues indica el porqué visto a través de los beneficios que la emancipación de la mujer ha de reportar, no sólo a ella, sino a toda la humanidad” (*La condición 42*). Considering the author’s own words in this essay, we can surmise that the portrayal of a male “victim” in this novel carries with it a crucial universalizing potential. That is, the success of the *mujer moderna* that Libertad represents would not only benefit women as individuals, but men as their potential companions. Secondly, the ángel del hogar paradigm and the lasting ideas set forth in *La perfecta casada* served a dual-purpose in the early twentieth century: they both identified a women’s ideal social position as that of wife and mother within the private, domestic sphere, and they conversely defined the duties and concerns of this private, domestic sphere as “women’s issues” or “women’s work.” Nelken attempts to disrupt this division by revealing a male perspective on several of these supposed “women’s” issues. Maternity and childbirth, motherhood and child-care – each of these typically female-centered experiences are filtered through the eyes of a male character, and

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203 Carmen de Burgos, Concha Espina, María Lejárraga (perhaps better known by her married name, María Martínez Sierra, or even her male pseudonym Gregorio Martínez Sierra), Federica Montseny, and Rosa Chacel are among the female novelists writing what can be considered socially minded novels with feminist agendas during the early twentieth century. See Johnson’s *Gender and Nation* for more information on these novels – as well as similarly socially-minded texts by male authors – and the term Johnson coins to describe this genre: “social modernism.”
portrayed in a way that highlights their relevance to men’s lives. As a result, Nelken’s narrative not only had the potential to influence a much broader audience, but it served to make visible women’s labor within the private sphere.\footnote{Nash makes the astute observation that, in early twentieth-century Spain, and in urban centers like Madrid and Barcelona in particular, female labor which was “rendered invisible” by a wage-based conception of work within the public sphere (Defying 25).} In the hopes of blurring, or even erasing, the boundaries between the public and private spheres, Nelken demonstrates that both men and women are capable of functioning in these realms. Through a successful feminist movement, women would neither look to motherhood as a means of economic stability, subsequently becoming dependent on men (like Salud), nor would they be forced to choose between forfeiting their right to an independent lifestyle and having children (like Libertad). Men’s lives would not suffer from such changes, but rather improve. In the feminist future Nelken envisions, male “victims” like Luis, \textit{el ahogado}, and female victims, like the uneducated Salud and the solitary Libertad, each burdened with maternal dilemmas, will truly only exist in the pages of fiction.

**Dignifying Motherhood as a Feminist Project: \textit{En torno a nosotras} (1927)**

Departing from \textit{La trampa del arenal}’s realist style, \textit{En torno a nosotras} brings divergent feminist viewpoints together in a more philosophical and dialogic form. In this text, Margarita Nelken skillfully crafts an ongoing dialogue between two sisters, Isabel and Elena. Both of these young women self-identify as feminists, yet they engage in profound debates which reveal their dissenting positions on many of the goals of the women’s movement. The lengthy dialogue exposes the most contentious and frequently deliberated issues underlying the struggle for women’s rights in Spain. Mangini describes the text as “dialógico y filosófico, y por ende, elusivo y provocador,” yet rightly notes that, of all
Nelken’s literature, contemporary critics have engaged the least with En torno a nosotras (“El papel” 174-75). Given that the feminist movement in early twentieth Spain has been the subject of much scholarly inquiry, particularly for the characteristics that set it apart from women’s movements in neighboring western nations, it is surprising that this text – written by a vocal, rather polemic, socialist feminist – has been largely overlooked. Inquiries into the philosophical trends of the period, studies of the importance of women’s socially-themed novels within modernist thought, and theorizations of the unique aspects of Spanish feminists’ agendas, have not delved into this text. However the profound dialogical exchange between the two female speakers in this novel makes it a fascinating example of the complexities of the Spanish feminist movement. Even more, the structure of Nelken’s En torno a nosotras promises to provide unique insight into the particular values and traditions which factored heavily into Spanish feminism – and Nelken’s specific understanding of the movement – especially if we keep in mind Spanish women’s theorization of the mujer moderna. As Roberta Johnson observes,

Although there are significant differences in the view of the new female self projected by the thinkers I discuss here, they all advocate wholeness, a compendium of several positions that includes more traditional female attitudes of care-giving and domesticity along with less traditional postures, including demands for legal equality and a share in public power. (Johnson, “Spanish Feminist Thought” 40)

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205 Regarding the “unique aspects of Spanish feminist thought” to which I refer, see Roberta Johnson’s articles, “Spanish Feminist Theory” (2003), “Issues and Arguments” (2005) and “El concepto de la soledad” (2009), and “Spanish Feminist Thought” (2010). Each explores key issues underlying first-wave Spanish feminism, and Johnson advises scholars of Spanish literature and culture on how to innovatively explore and contemplate feminist issues in the work produced by early twentieth century Spanish women, and their successors, given the unique aspects of the movement in the Iberian Peninsula.
Key to understanding this new Spanish woman, a “hybrid of tradition and modernity,” to use Johnson’s words (40), is the careful attention Nelken devotes to the predicament of woman-as-mother within this new paradigm. Maternity and motherhood are indeed key themes in *En torno a nosotras*, and Mangini even suggests that within this novel, “el tema de la maternidad mediatiza y determina irrevocablemente ‘la condición social’ de la mujer” (“El papel” 175). As such, a careful analysis of the way in which this traditional female role is debated, defended, and theorized within this text will augment our understanding not only of Nelken’s feminism, but of first-wave Spanish feminist thought in a broader sense.

In this novel, Nelken presents two sisters, both young, well-educated female personalities, who will engage in an extensive philosophical dialogue regarding the position of women within their contemporary society. The unique dialogic form of this novel is crucial to understanding the way in which Nelken frames the controversial feminist issues which she will explore. To better understand the implications of this literary structure, it is useful to return to two of the earliest practitioners of dialogue: Socrates and Plato. In the context of the early twentieth-century Spanish novel, Roberta Johnson has pointed to the prevalence of dialogue within the “philosophical novel,” which she defines as a work that “foregrounds philosophy in a discursive manner” (*Crossfire* x). She emphasizes the usefulness of dialogue for exploring certain philosophical positions and enterprises, postulating that Spanish authors employed dialogue much in the same way as Plato: “namely, to achieve an inconclusive and open-ended philosophical position not available in the essay or treatise… In some ways […] they] returned to Plato’s attitude toward philosophy, seeing it as a quest and a questioning rather than as a rhetoric and persuasion” (*Crossfire* 7).

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206 Johnson discusses those “novelist-thinkers” who belonged to the so-called “Generation of ‘98” and “Generation of ‘14” (*Crossfire* 7). While she preserves the notion of Generations, she interprets them as
Spanish dialogues, like Plato’s, often took place between two individuals whose relationship resembles that of master and pupil. Importantly, she notes, the master is not always the indisputable winner: “Indeed, in neither the Platonic dialogues nor the Spanish novels does one philosophical position clearly prevail” (7). Finally, Johnson’s introduction highlights narrative refraction as a crucial difference between the dialogues of Plato and those of Spanish novelists: “A dialogue embedded in a novelistic context is colored by that context, especially by the implied author’s and the narrator’s view of the character who speaks the lines” (7-8).

This is in fact a key distinction which will influence Nelken’s presentation of feminist philosophies in En torno a nosotras. As such, it is useful to consider the use of dialogue in its broader, Socratic tradition.

According to James P. Zappen, the voice of Socrates has become “inextricably merged with the writings of Plato” (1). However Zappen identifies a trend in recent scholarship whereby Socratic dialogue is not envisioned as mere precursor to the dialectic and rhetoric of Plato and Aristotle, and Socratic questioning is no longer viewed as a quest for universal definitions or a fruitless search for the truth, but rather as “a true art of politics” (1). This renewed interest and broader vision of Socratic dialogue offers an opportunity, according to Zappen, “to rethink the very meaning and purpose of public discourse not as

“dynamic categories that overlap and interact, constantly defining and redefining one another. The writers within a generation changed over time, often due to contact with members of older and younger generations” (x). This fluid definition of the generational classifications allows, then, for the accommodation of writers (and especially women novelists like Nelken) who may have previously been omitted or neglected within the Spanish literary canon.

Johnson further clarifies this important distinction between Platonic dialogues and dialogues embedded in a novel (she makes particular note of dialogues within novels by Miguel de Unamuno, Pío Baroja, Rosa Chacel, and Benjamin Jarnés). According to Johnson, “This essential difference is crucial to understanding the way philosophy is present in the novels studied here. Often, a character who espouses a particular philosophical position is thoroughly undermined by the narrator’s attitude toward him or her, and thus the philosophical position is likewise cast in an unfavorable light. Narrative refraction through the narrator’s attitude or dialogue between characters is frequently overlooked by those who write on Spanish intellectual history, and there are numerous cases of a character’s being cited as the author’s mouthpiece for his own philosophical position with no consideration of the novelistic context (Crossfire 8).
persuasion but as an ongoing exchange in which we test and contest and create ideas in cooperation and when necessary in conflict with others” (2). As a result of the omniscient narrator in this novel (which lends to the narrative refraction identified by Johnson) and thus its significant diversion from the structure of Platonic dialogue, I prefer to classify Nelken’s narrative structure in En torno a nosotras as a “Socratic dialogue.” Following Zappen’s elaboration, this will allow us to consider the speakers’ ongoing exchange as a true art of feminist politics, which seeks more to illuminate the codependence of seemingly disparate issues than to persuade the audience to accept one particular point of view.

Of Nelken’s two interlocutors in En torno a nosotras, Elena is the younger of the sisters (the narrator suggests she is twenty or twenty-two), and Isabel is only slightly older, in the range of twenty-five to thirty years old. Elena consistently affirms her direct observations or beliefs regarding women’s condition as oppressed and exploited members of society, and Isabel steadily tempers her statements. Isabel is presented as the more mature and experienced of the two women, yet her ideological position often appears to be conservative from a contemporary feminist standpoint. That is, Isabel expresses numerous “traditional” ideas about women, despite the fact that she self-identifies as a feminist. On the other hand, the narrator paints Elena as “tan estudiosa, tan ufana de sus éxitos de estudiante, y de labrarse un porvenir idéntico al de sus compañeros de clase – menos aplicados que ella, justo es reconocerlo” (17). The narrator repeatedly references the “juventud” and “inexperiencia en la vida” of this younger sister throughout the text. One of Elena’s defining characteristics is the fact that she is not at all hesitant to put her thoughts into words.208 She is passionate and, the narrator’s slightly ironic estimation of this younger sister suggests that her more radical

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208 The narrator explains that, for Elena, “las emociones no tardan nunca mucho en exteriorizarse en palabras” (154)
philosophy has not yet been tested; Elena expresses “ideas a que sólo se atreve la extrema juventud […] ¡Feliz Elena! Tan recientes sus adquisiciones intelectuales” (5-6). The eyes and the mirada of the two sisters further contrast their personalities and convictions. Isabel’s mirada is “menos transparente que la de Elena, cuyos ojos, inquebrantablemente afirmativos o negativos, tienen la inmóvil traslucidez de los cuarzos y las piedras marinas” (6-7). This characterization is crucial, as it will not only define the women’s style of debate throughout the novel, but also shed light on the influential perspective and attitude of the implied narrator. Furthermore, according to Johnson’s observation of the master/pupil relationship often apparent between Platonic interlocutors in the Spanish philosophical novel, Elena appears to take on the role of the “pupil,” whereas Isabel is positioned as the “master” within the exchange. As such, the latter employs sustained, methodical logic which challenges the premises upon which the former’s radical theses are constructed.

Regarding the creation of these two distinct voices, Mangini has suggested an interpretation of the text which depends heavily on attention to the author’s biography. In fact, she correlates the younger, educated, and more radically feminist Elena to the author. Nevertheless, Mangini identifies the problematic ambiguity which results from the fact that the ideas of this younger (possibly autobiographic) interlocutor do not generally emerge victorious: “La ambigüedad procede del hecho de que, aunque Elena parezca representar la ardiente voz de la autora, a veces Isabel, más conservadora y articulada que su hermana idealista, matiza las ideas de Elena, y presta una visión más realista de la situación de la mujer” (174-75). Mangini is correct in noting that Elena often voices quite radical ideas.
regarding feminist reform about which Nelken had written or spoken publically. However, there are two additional factors which must be considered for this reading to be sufficient. First, as Johnson has pointed out, the dialogue in this text is colored by the novelistic context, and thus we must pay attention to the way in which the narrator reacts to and characterizes each individual in the exchange. As we have already seen, Elena is in fact often undermined by the narrator’s emphasis on her youthful inexperience. Secondly, Mangini’s autobiographical reading could be expanded by acknowledging the fact that Isabel, too, often functions as the author’s spokeswoman on several topics, despite her apparently traditional ideological position. In particular, Isabel is an advocate of the “posibilidad de divorcio,” largely because she believes the institution of marriage too often makes prostitutes (rameras) out of women (140). Nelken makes this same comparison in La condición social (49-60), and we have seen her critique of the degrading nature of unhappy bourgeois marriages through Salud and Luis in La trampa del arenal. Furthermore, there are striking similarities between Isabel’s purportedly conservative stance on maternity and motherhood, and Nelken’s attempts to dignify these traditional roles in La condición social de la mujer en España and La mujer ante las cortes constituyentes.

Consequently, if we do read this text biographically, we must consider the fact that Nelken is present in each of these women, not merely in the younger Elena, whose feminist objections most closely align with contemporary notions of western feminism. It is my contention that the misunderstanding of Isabel’s position results when one privileges liberal, equal-rights feminism over maternal, social feminism.\footnote{See LeGates for more detailed information on the goals of liberal (equal-rights) feminism and maternal (social) feminism in the American and Western European context (3-6, 243-56).} As such, liberal feminists often perceive opinions like Isabel’s as threateningly conservative, particularly regarding women’s
maternity, while overlooking the benefits that this particular position can provide. For example, LeGates has noted that feminists could actually utilize maternal feminism as a way of reaching out to more conservative women in the hopes of forming alliances which might encourage a mass movement (253-54). In En torno a nosotras, Nelken’s Isabel insists that her stance falls well within the realms of feminism, and she best expresses this defense towards the end of the novel when Elena accuses her of being anti-feminist:

Nada más divertido, Elena, que oírte hablar de mi antifeminismo. Por lo visto, todo lo que no sea entonar un himno a la mujer mártir, e, incluso, todo lo que sea intentar examinar serenamente las conveniencias y posibilidades de la naturaleza femenina, es antifeminismo. ¡Y yo que me tenía, por el contrario, por una superfeminista…! (216-17)

This peculiarity, then, raises curious questions regarding the available and appropriate means for Nelken to articulate her unique feminist position in Spain. En torno a nosotras insinuates that her complex conception of feminism can only be expressed, even within fiction, by two distinct voices in an ongoing process of questioning and exchange. How else could such hybrid perspective be portrayed? A sole protagonista feminista of this sort would run the risk of being deemed a feminine aberration akin to the often caricatured Anglo-feminist sufragette by a conservative readership, or as a regressive anti-feminist by liberals. The Socratic dialogue, we must recall, allows not only for these complex ideas to be tested and contested, but for new ideas to be created in both cooperation and conflict with existing ones (Zappen 2). Given that female experiences – specifically maternity and motherhood – factor heavily into these two women’s feminist discussion, it is inevitable that the issue of women’s difference will also surface as a point of contention. In fact these two issues (motherhood and
gender difference) are mutually dependent in this text, and Isabel struggles to convince her sister of these necessary considerations.

While we have established that some Spanish feminists, including both Burgos and Nelken, indeed espoused a feminism that accepted and even embraced women’s difference, the two voices in *En torno a nosotras* are not in agreement on this issue. The younger Elena begins the dialogue – and indeed the entire narrative – with the deceptively simple statement, typical of liberal, equal-rights feminist rhetoric: “La mujer es igual al hombre” (5). To this assertion, Isabel replies, almost rhetorically, “¿Igual? […] ¿Absolutamente igual, Elena?” (5-7). In this first chapter, the stage is set for an ongoing discussion of equality, inequality, and inferiority. It is important to note that Isabel never speaks of “igualdad,” and in fact aspires to convince her younger sister of the importance of recognizing “desigualdad,” which she emphasizes is *not* the same as “inferioridad” (114). Elena is reticent to accept the argument for difference and perceives her sister’s nuanced terminology to be mere semantic wordplay. Rather than justify this behavior, the narrator’s commentary implies that this younger sister is behaving rather impulsively:

Ese obligado reconocimiento de una diferencia entre su horizonte intelectual y el que se abre ante sus compañeros de estudio, más que mortificarla – pues no se aviene a ella – la irrita. Donde Isabel dice: diferencia, ella traduce: inferioridad, y el orgullo de sus veinte años, inteligentes y esforzados, encabritase al pensar en el obstáculo que un día surgirá en su camino, cual barrera infranqueable. (185)

For Isabel, on the other hand, this recognition of difference is not an obstacle, but rather the precise point of departure from which she believes truly feminist change can be enacted. By
attempting to equate women with men, feminists devalue what she believes are some of women’s strongest qualities: “¿Por qué situar dos cosas en un mismo plano, aun reconociendo su diferencia? Créeme, Elena: más rebajan a la mujer los que pretenden equipararla al hombre en todas sus condiciones, que los que aspiran a establecer serenamente las diferencias que existen entre ambos” (175). According to Isabel’s logic, equating women with men will only create a greater rift between the sexes, whereas affirming difference “puede llevar a un conocimiento más perfecto y el conocimiento no divide, sino aproxima” (175). Isabel is adamant that it will only be through women’s acceptance of difference that the possibility will arise to correct social injustices and inequalities.²¹¹ This position is sustained throughout the text, and the narrative voice appears to support Isabel’s calm and logical reasoning, whilst remaining skeptical of Elena’s brash refusal to accept difference.

The first instance in which the theme of motherhood surfaces in the sisters’ dialogue appears in the third chapter, when the sisters reference a recent visit from a professional female friend who lives abroad and works as a teacher. Elena expresses her admiration for this Spanish ex-patriot and her new life full of “estudio afanoso y de riguroso individualismo” (16). Isabel, though, becomes pensive after observing a peculiarity in her friend: “hay en ella algo… algo indefinible” (17). Mangini considers this visitor to be the “vehículo para contrastar su vida con la de la madre de Elena e Isabel, una mujer con ocho hijos que está contenta de estar en casa, placenteramente haciendo encaje” (“El papel” 175).

Indeed, this woman epitomizes an entirely antithetical female lifestyle to that of the sisters’ mother, and in this sense the opposition serves to make palpable the “maternal dilemma”, or the “conflict between social and individualist aspirations” that motherhood presented for

²¹¹ Isabel is careful to include herself, stating that women must accept “nuestra diferencia” if they truly desire to “remediar las más flagrantes injusticias que hoy padecemos” (233).
feminists (Allen 5). Elena is prone to believe a woman must choose either one role or the other, making the distinction between the professional woman who is able to “vivir,” and the housewife, the ángel del hogar, who merely remains at home to “vegetar” (21). Mangini describes this conflict in Elena as a “lucha interior”: “Aunque respeta a su adorada madre, cree que ser profesional es más importante que ser madre” (“El papel”175-76). On the other hand, Isabel comes to the defense of their mother, and cautions Elena on assuming that every new opportunity presented to women will necessarily prove to be more fulfilling. She points out that many new models of womanhood have the potential to be “excesivamente nuevas, y su novedad nos oculta su verdadero carácter, dando matices triunfales a lo que, en hombres, es tan mezquino como eso [ser ángel del hogar], y disimulando el matiz de deserción que a menudo tienen” (25). Furthermore, Isabel opposes Elena’s opposition “vivir-vegetar,” countering that “¡Hay tantas maneras de vivir su vida!” (25). In this instance, Isabel’s hesitancy to entirely reject or denounce the role of the ángel del hogar serves neither to disprove nor negate Elena’s feminist position, but rather to remind her that mothers must not be ignored or denigrated within the liberal aims of the women’s movement.

For Isabel, then, the ángel del hogar is not a role which should be belittled, but rather respected when the woman is able to take pride in her ability to provide for her family, knowing she is a crucial component of their well-being. When Elena objects that this is a “sacrificio,” Isabel counters that “el sacrificio gozoso no es sacrificio […] Ahí es precisamente el error: en ver el sacrificio, pues con verlo ya existe” (28). For the elder of the two sisters, the social problem does not necessarily reside in the fact that tradition, religion, and cultural morale guide women to be wives and mothers, but that those women who may

212 This is a noteworthy appearance of the phrase that titles Carmen de Burgos’s final novel, Quiero vivir mi vida (1931), which I have discussed in Chapter 1.
choose to voluntarily fulfill their maternal potential – to engage in motherhood proudly and effectively – earn no respect. Herein dwells the cynosure which converts Isabel’s apparently conservative feminist stance regarding women’s relation to the mother-role into a quite modern, even revolutionary, standpoint. While Isabel defends the mother who raises children with her husband and maintains the home for the love of her family, she further defends the mother who raises a child without this traditional support system. She advocates a new social perception of motherhood and maternity which considers these female experiences independently of all other social structures and institutions (namely marriage, but also paternity investigations and legally mandated child support payments). Isabel’s radical affirmation – here, far from a conservative position – is again rooted in a positive evaluation of women’s difference:

El hombre no puede jamás pronunciar como ella: mi hijo. El posesivo aquí es, por esencia, del género femenino. […] Creo que bastaría si, en lugar de rebajar el tema a una disposición legal (para nosotras legal, por desgracia, quiere también generalmente decir material), se aspirase, ante todo, a dignificar, en sí y de por sí, la maternidad. (89)

Fundamental to Isabel’s argument is a positive evaluation of women’s bodies precisely for, not despite, their reproductive capacities. She prefers to accept biological differences between the sexes, but strives to alter the social conditions and cultural bigotry surrounding the maternal role: “Todas las leyes del mundo no impedirán que seamos sólo nosotras las que llevemos la carga de dolor de nuestros hijos, lo mismo después que antes del parto” (161).

Isabel reiterates her desire to dignify maternity and motherhood later in the novel, and her discourse takes on a stronger, almost militant tone which competes with her younger
feminist sister’s challenges: “Exijamos respeto para este dolor de la maternidad: la maternidad considerada en sí, por cuanto significa de por sí, aislada de otras consideraciones” (162). She even suggests that feminists are asking too little in their demands, which reflects the way in which they have been culturally conditioned to believe that maternal responsibilities are unworthy of respect: “Las más empanadas defensoras de nuestros derechos piden demasiado poco” (162). She believes the desire for economic assistance is “demasiado poco en asunto tan grande,” and that paternity investigations will only lead to farces (162-63). In each case, Isabel believes that these “protecciones impuestas” are insufficient, as men will still be able to find ways of avoiding their responsibilities if they so choose, and thus such legal or political dispositions will do little or nothing to alter the social prejudices that inform perceptions of mothers – especially single mothers. She prefers respect to any of these artificially imposed sanctions: “No se me alcanza cómo la mujer no pone su orgullo en hacer de su maternidad un algo absoluto, que se base a sí mismo. Exigir el derecho a llevar al hijo siempre delante, independientemente del padre: he aquí la única y verdadera dignificación de la maternidad” (163, emphasis mine).

Isabel’s desires are certainly idealistic, but if we compare her impassioned discourse to the issues Nelken sets forth in La condición social, particularly in the chapter on “Maternología y puericultura,” we can easily perceive the feminism of the author in the voice of Isabel. Despite the fact that she represents the interlocutor who Mangini has labeled the more “conservative” of the two women self-identifying as feminists (“El papel”), this

213 En torno a nosotras alludes to the way in which single mothers are unjustly judged and looked down upon by traditional, conservative, largely Catholic values that informed Spanish society; however the text does not address the less abstract difficulties confronting these single mothers in the city (low wages, insecure jobs, insufficient salaries, and lack of child-care). We need only consider Carmen de Burgos’s La rampa, and even Nelken’s own La trampa del arenal, to question the practicality of a single, working class woman attempting to “llevar al hijo siempre delante, independientemente del padre,” as Nelken’s Isabel suggests (163).
categorization presumes that it is inherently contradictory for a woman to assume the roles of “mother” and “feminist.” Nelken, however, disproves this assumption by demonstrating that these roles constitute neither a contradiction nor an obstruction to feminist progress. In order to accomplish this, she places maternity and motherhood within the framework of women’s sexuality. Therefore, as a part of female sexuality, the restrictive and prohibitive discourse that fosters shame, silence, and condemnation surrounding women’s sexual activity, also damages the maternal experience. Nelken resented this social construction, especially propagated by one of the most powerful institutional forces influencing Spanish women: the Catholic Church. The specific impasse that Christian, or Catholic, feminists in Spain could not manage to surmount was the reconsideration of women’s role within the family. That is, while we have seen that difference feminists like Nelken did indeed place enormous value on women as mothers, the revolutionary stance behind this sublimation was their proposition that this role should not be considered women’s only social contribution, nor should it be required of or refused to any woman. Catholic organizations, on the other hand, considered the re-definition of the mother role (from a primary, natural female identity within a sanctioned marriage, to a secondary, voluntary role which any woman could perform) a “threat to the security and well-being of the family” as “any incursion into the

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214 Mangini maintains that Elena appears to best represent the voice of Nelken, and her reading of the text takes into account the author’s biography. Nevertheless, she reads the dialogue in a way that positions Isabel as the wiser, more experienced – perhaps disillusioned – Nelken, while Elena reflects the author’s memories of her optimistic feminist beginnings: “La autora contrasta la actitud de una mujer práctica con la actitud de otra que espera cosas excepcionales para la mujer. He aquí entonces a la Nelken realista que ha sufrido los golpes del patriarcado por sus atrevidas ideas, y que ve los límites que le han impuesto, y la otra Nelken que espera todavía revolver el mundo con sus avanzadas ideas para cambiar la lamentable situación de la mujer española” (“El papel” 175). Mangini’s interpretation, then, casts Isabel as the least feminist of the two women.

215 Expanding on this concern, Martínez Gutiérrez appropriately summarizes Nelken’s stance on this topic: “Nelken explica… que como parte de esta sexualidad [femenina], la maternidad padece una situación precaria idéntica a la de la educación y la salubridad. La sistemática construcción social de todo acto natural ha convertido a la sexualidad en algo convenientemente vergonzoso. La iglesia sólo concebía una maternidad noble: la milagrosa de la Virgen María” (22).
public sphere of work was considered unnatural and a discredit to her ‘sublime’ mission as mother and ‘angel of the hearth’” (Nash, *Defying* 23).

Correspondingly, since the head of the Church ordained and endorsed these roles, many conservative Spanish women who adhered closely to their Catholic values “did not always consider themselves victims in their traditional roles as wives and mothers” (28). Nelken perceives this problem to be specifically Spanish: “Hay un aspecto, en la vida de la mujer española, en el cual ésta se halla totalmente desamparada, y, con relación a las mujeres de todos los países de civilización occidental, rezagada en varias centurias: el de la maternidad” (*La mujer* 54). Indeed the “conservative” Isabel in *En torno a nosotras* finds this construct, informed by the impulse to dignify a paradigm of unrealistic maternity above all else, infuriating. She reminds her younger sister, “Por muy inocente que sea una novia en nuestro días, sabe de sobra que la Virgen María es la única mujer de quien se tiene noticias de haber sido fecundada por el Espíritu Santo” (129). The adoration of an impossible model of feminine motherhood (virgin mother), combined with the church’s necessary concession of compelling women to approach this perfection (as virgin or mother), leads to one of the most prodigious social challenges facing Spanish women in relation to their potential roles as mother: “la falta de comprensión del respeto debido a toda maternidad, sólo por el hecho de serlo y sean cuales fueren sus causas” (*La condición social* 123; *Maternología* 11). This is precisely Isabel’s lamentation in *En torno a nosotras*, as she strives to “dignificar la maternidad” (it is also Libertad’s frustration, if we recall *La trampa del arenal*).

In addition to the economic, legal, and material implications of transforming social perceptions of motherhood, Elena and Isabel also engage in a debate concerning the more

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216 Even the Papal Encyclicals of Pius XI in 1930 and 1931 stipulated that a woman’s “oficio” was that of mother within the home, and that her employment outside the home should be prevented at all cost (Davies, *Spanish Women’s Writing* 100-101).
abstract concepts which inform feminist interpretations of this maternal role. In this sense, the text clearly moves beyond that of the realist novels of Carmen de Burgos, and even Nelken’s own *La trampa del arenal*, by foregrounding this philosophical discourse. One such issue at the core of Nelken’s feminist interpretation of mothers is an opposition that Isabel and Elena discuss at length: “el instinto maternal” versus “el instinto paternal” (156-61). The debate on these highly gendered faculties begins when Elena affirms that, because it is capable of the greatest sacrifice and of complete self-abnegation, “el sentimiento maternal es el más fuerte y noble de los sentimientos humanos” (154). Isabel then makes the carefully crafted concession that certainly “el sentimiento maternal” is strong (“fuerte”) – this is inevitable given that it is also instinctive – yet she does not refer to it as noble. This, she affirms, is reserved for a love that is rational (“razonado”), not instinctual (155). She places a father’s love for his child under the banner of “noble,” given that she believes “en el hombre, el instinto paternal no existe” (156). Isabel enters into polemic territory here, and her reasoning reveals many of the concerns of difference-based first-wave feminists:

[El amor al hijo] Es más fuerte cuanto más instintivo, cuanto más absoluto y menos razonado: quiero a mi hijo porque es mi hijo; le defiendo por encima y en contra de todo, porque es mi hijo, *mi prolongación física*; porque, no obstante el corte operado en el cordón que lo sujetaba a mi vientre, *sigue viviendo dentro mí, y siento en mi carne todo lo que él siente*. Los golpes que él recibe, en mí es en quien hacen brotar sangre. Sin razonar. No hay que razonar. Mi hijo puede ser un malvado, un degenerado, el ser más vil, menos humano de la tierra: *es un pedazo de mi cuerpo*; y le quiero y le defiendo como quiero y defiendo a uno de mis miembros! Reconozco, desde luego, que
nada hay tan grande como el amor maternal; pero, reconoce entonces también que la palabra noble corresponde, más propiamente, a un amor menos instintivo y más razonado. (154-55, italics mine)

According to her logic, the discourse of sexual difference here affords women an advantage, since a man (a father) “no puede quererse a sí mismo en su hijo. Siquiera al principio, cuando el hijo no se le puede ofrecer aún, como con frecuencia más tarde, cual propio reflejo” (155-56). Isabel explains to her sister: “En el hombre, el amor al hijo es un resultado: resultado de un proceso individual y colectivo” (157). That is, individually a man is forced to overcome his natural egoism and expand his capacity to love, while collectively (or socially) he must negotiate both the social and moral demands placed upon him in order to achieve his “satisfacción de reproducirse y prolongarse en la descendencia” (157). In fact, this issue is explored in La trampa del arena, and the fictional male protagonist Luis provides Nelken with a canvas on which to experiment with the practical implications of this two-fold theory of paternal responsibility independent of any natural instinct.

Of further importance is the fact that both sisters – despite the differences evident in much of their feminist thought – ultimately agree on the existence of a maternal instinct. Not surprisingly, it is Isabel who is most adamant about this maternal inclination: “Yo estoy tan convencida de la fuerza del instinto maternal, que allí donde éste desaparece, me resisto a comprobar su inexistencia, y prefiero comprobar, una vez más, la fuerza omnipotente de los prejuicios fraguados por la sociedad” (160). Elena is less optimistic, affirming that “prejuicios capaces de ahogar la voz más fuerte de la naturaleza, poco tienen de consoladores” (160, emphasis mine). Isabel continues her defense and elaboration of maternal love and counters: “A los prejuicios, siempre cabe la esperanza de oponerles algún
dia prejuicios contrarios” (160). She explains to her younger sister that a mother’s love is always the strongest, and that unlike the procedural development of paternal love, “en la mujer, por el contrario, el amor al hijo no es resultado, sino causa” (156-57). According to Nash, this type of naturalizing discourse of sexual difference was extremely frequent in the twenties and thirties as a way of impeding women’s progress, and its core feature was an insistence on “amor maternal como único eje vertebrador de la feminidad” (“Identidades” 43). Yet in this text we see this same axis of femininity employed in a way that undermines this restrictive, patriarchal purpose. Isabel proposes instead that this quality be celebrated for the potential advantages it can afford women with regards to their individual rights within both the public and private spheres. Like Isabel, Nelken celebrated the maternal instinct, labeling it “el sentimiento más sagrado y profundo de la vida” (Martínez, Exiliadas 61). In *En torno a nosotras*, Isabel employs motherhood as a crucial component of her gender-difference discourse in order to convince her sister that a truly feminist agenda aiming to defend and advance women’s rights must celebrate “el que verdaderamente nos eleva” (165).

In the opinion of the elder Isabel, labeled “antifeminista” by her fictional sister and “conservative” by literary critics, the most salient “difference” in women is of universal magnitude: “La maternidad no es cosa transitoria […] Es cosa de todos los momentos y todas las circunstancias” (196-97).

Mangini views Isabel as representative of Nelken’s estimation that nothing had changed in Spain since her publication of *La condición social* eight years earlier (“El papel”). This interpretation implies that those women who insist on adhering to more traditional values still discourage, and even halt, the progress of young liberal feminists like Elena. Yet as late as 1931, Nelken was fighting for the rights of women workers – especially mothers –
by employing the phrase “desigualdad necesaria” (La mujer 86). With this language, she points to the need for employers to accommodate women in the workforce and take extra steps to protect their jobs owing to their particular “circunstancias físicas” during maternity and after childbirth (La mujer 86-87). Therefore in the end, Isabel can only be labeled “conservative” in the dialogic exchange if the critical position taken is one that privileges Anglo-American, or even Western European, definitions of feminism based on the struggle for equal-rights – namely suffrage. Numerous historians have shown that this equal-rights discourse was only one brand of European feminism. Furthermore, in the Spanish context, Scanlon has demonstrated that political rights like suffrage were not the essential issues in feminist debate, and Nash explains that the Spanish feminist movement was predominantly a social rather than a political struggle (“Género” 20).

By dismissing self-proclaimed feminists like Isabel as detrimental to the movement, critics overlook a fundamental component of many Spanish women’s feminist identities during the early decades of the twentieth century. Perhaps rather than branding women who valued motherhood and maternal values as regressive, limited, or conservative, we might instead consider these views in light of the model dialogue of En torno a nosotras. Such a perspective will allow us to focus on the way in which their unique, and often dissenting, articulations contributed to a complex dialogic revision of the existing, highly gendered, socio-cultural order. As such, we may develop an alternative, more intricate understanding of the Spanish feminist movement, especially if we keep in mind Socrates’ conclusion on

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217 See Bock & Thane, Cova, Offen, and LeGates, for example.
218 Mary Nash has written extensively on the fact that first-wave Spanish feminism concentrated more on social rather than political issues, and her observation that women like Nelken privileged social rights (divorce, improved education, equal pay and access to wage labor) for women, and especially mothers, above political rights like suffrage confirms this observation (Defying 41). Nash affirms: “Spanish feminism in both the late 19th and early 20th century can be characterized more by its social than its political orientation. As a movement, it was not singularly suffragist in focus, and the core of Spanish feminist arguments for women’s rights was not individual rights based on the idea of gender equality” (35).
dialogue: “[R]hetoric and dialogue are distinct and opposed endeavors – rhetoric a vehicle of persuasion in pursuit of an unjust empire, *dialogue the only true art of politics in pursuit of justice and the other virtues*” (Zappen 14, emphasis mine). Women like Isabel, and even Nelken herself, refused to completely reject motherhood or deny their maternity, as they considered the mother role to be a virtuous one. Nevertheless, they demanded both freedom of choice and authentic respect which would dignify any social role that women may consciously chose to fulfill as individuals. By allowing the supposedly “conservative” voice of a difference (maternal) feminist like Isabel to fit the role of “master” within her Socratic dialogue, Nelken creates a scenario in which the so-called “liberal pupil,” Elena, is challenged to critically examine her own passionate defense of the rhetoric employed by equal-rights feminists. Even more, Nelken’s use of a third narrative voice who at times tempers the flow of the dialogue – frequently reminding readers of Isabel’s maturity and experience, and Elena’s youthful idealism – functions in such a way that it both mediates the novel ideas of Elena while sustaining the objections of Isabel. Isabel’s ultimate estimation of the women’s movement in fact parallels this type of dialectical compromise: “Lo verdaderamente revolucionario, no es la revolución, sino la evolución. Es necesario que haya quien investigue y descubra; y necesario es que haya quien conserve” (238). For difference-feminists like Isabel, a one-size-fits-all radical women’s movement that might overturn the validity of many of their core maternal values was neither appealing nor desirable.

For her part, Nelken observed that one of the most frustrating issues was the lack of coherence, or universality in the Spanish feminist movement. She recognized the need for

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219 Nelken discusses the lack of universality throughout chapter XII (“Distanciamiento del espíritu universal”) of *La condición social*. Specifically, she observes: “Y esta falta de ‘sentido universal’ es la que deja nuestro feminismo a merced de todas las direcciones y le hace ser inconscientemente terreno abonado para cualquier
Spanish women to unify for the common cause of improving their own economic situation and obtaining the (social) rights which they had been unjustly denied. She herself was a staunch defender of women of all social classes, including mothers, wives within traditional marriages, working women, and even prostitutes. Consequently, Nelken’s Socratic interlocutors, each of whom embody purportedly opposing “feminisms,” provide an appropriate creative means through which she might explore and present the plurality, complexity, and possibilities of the Spanish feminist movement’s ongoing evolution. Moreover, through this particular literary form, Nelken is able to advance her feminist message by metaphorically alluding to this same division amongst the “sisters” of the Spanish nation. Thus rather than attempt a persuasive feminist rhetoric which might fail to account for the diverse preoccupations of many Spanish women (by appearing blind to the concerns of maternal feminists, or privileging political rights), Nelken’s dialogue is ultimately ambiguous. This type of non-aggressive, quite impartial ambiguity invites readers to contemplate the way in which they too might enter into a rational dialogue with their Spanish sisters for the sake of garnering a more profound understanding of both their personal convictions, and of the women’s movement as a whole. In the end, Isabel’s words might be read as a non-discriminating, “universal” invitation approved by Margarita Nelken herself, and equally applicable to young, educated women, working class women, upper- or middle-class women, and especially wives and mothers: “Yo llamaría liberación de la mujer a la lucencia que cada mujer encendiese en su propia conciencia; al deseo de superación de lo cotidiano que cada una llevase en sí” (238-39). Thus every woman – regardless of her marital status, social position, level of education, degree of economic stability, or even quantity of

impulso – ajeno a él – que se le quiera dar; y por ley de contraste natural, que le hace anularse ante presiones que deberían permanecerle siempre extrañas” (199).
children – is capable in Nelken’s eyes of contributing to the necessary process of transformation which would improve the present situation of all women. The key lies, however, in the illumination of their own consciences, the abandoning of judgment, and the development of a genuine respect for all freely-chosen female social roles.
Chapter 4: The Art of Maternity in the Literature of Federica Montseny (1905-1994)

Los dioses creaban fríamente, animaban barros, daban apariencia humana a bloques de tierra, a nada supremo y amado. Las madres son más que los dioses: crean de sí mismas, crean en sí mismas y sufren y aman y pueden morir al crear.


As a woman who celebrated maternity and motherhood as uniquely female modes of individual expression, and as a stark advocate of women’s rights as mothers, Federica Montseny’s feminist position may initially appear conspicuously essentialist, sharing many concerns of conservative, maternal feminists. By recognizing and even celebrating women’s difference, as well as placing a high value on motherhood as a hallmark of a woman’s lived experience, Montseny frequently encountered the “dilemma of difference,” which DiQuinzio has identified in feminists who accept and explicitly celebrate women’s distinctions from men. In essence, by recognizing difference, particularly by way of their maternity, these feminists inevitably put themselves in jeopardy when it comes to obtaining complete equality with men. For Montseny, this “dilemma of difference,” however, did not warrant resolution, but rather negotiation. Anarchism informed her defense of women and, as such, her celebration of difference must be qualified within the liberated social structures she envisioned. Rather than search for a solution that would eliminate difference from her discourse, Montseny strives to elaborate the heterogeneity of female maternal capabilities by fully embracing this dilemma. Montseny’s various essays, published between 1923 and 1933, will be the primary means through which this chapter will approach her unique theory of mothering. In these publications she lays bare the intricacies of her attitudes towards
feminism, humanism, and anarchism. Specifically, given the popularity of the series of articles “La mujer, problema del hombre I-VI” and their subsequent reprinting as *El problema de los sexos*, these essays will serve as the bases for this chapter’s analyses of Montseny’s narrative fiction. Moreover, Montseny’s anarchism factors heavily into the creation of her female protagonists, as she places them within utopic social surroundings that allow for dramatic and often unpopular decisions that break with traditional values, norms, and institutional politics.

From this point of departure, I will explore Montseny’s final full-length novel *La indomable* (1928), as well as two short novelas published by *La Revista Blanca* in the *La Novela Ideal* series: “Maternidad” (1925) and “El derecho al hijo” (1928). My aim will be to position Montseny’s anarcho-feminist understanding of motherhood within the broader context of first-wave feminist activity in Spain. *La indomable* explores the way in which even an ideal, modern “superwoman” will inevitably encounter the maternal dilemma should she wish to engage in motherhood as a means of fulfilling her individual subjectivity. That is, the dilemma is not unique to certain women, but rather an inevitable byproduct of biological womanhood. Even the most educated, potentially liberated and free women, are not immune to this conflict within Montseny’s contemporary society. Secondly, Montseny’s brief novelas provide her with an appropriate platform upon which she may engage in the ensuing “paradoxical politics of mothering.” “Maternidad” questions what exactly it means to be a

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220 Montseny’s essays differ from those of the other women in this study, primarily because she did not publish one extensive work with an individual publisher. Whereas Margarita Nelken’s *La condición social de la mujer en España* (1921) and Carmen de Burgos’s *La mujer moderna y sus derechos* (1927) were lengthy studies and products of several years (perhaps decades, in Burgos’s case) of research and experience, Montseny’s array of short articles and essays appeared frequently, and profusely, in popular journals and revistas, especially in *La Revista Blanca*, between 1923 and 1938.

221 Mary Nash’s observations further support this decision, given that she suggests that the reappearance of these essays in “forma de folleto,” best exemplifies “de forma definitiva … el pensamiento de Federica Montseny sobre la mujer” (“Dos intelectuales” 75).
mother and suggests that institutions are largely to blame for preventing women from celebrating their maternity, embracing a maternal role, or even ethically choosing not to become mothers. Finally, “El derecho al hijo” presents what may be considered the most polemic issue – voluntary single motherhood. While we have seen how Margarita Nelken alluded to this option through the voice of Libertad, *La trampa del arenal*’s “mujer-moderna,” Montseny unambiguously argues that single motherhood should indeed be a plausible, valid choice for young Spanish women exercising their own free will. Through each of these tales and Montseny’s essays, we will see how this anarcho-feminist construes motherhood and mothering as a female art form, an individual right, and ultimately a powerful vital force which ensures the future of both the nation, and humanity.

**The “Anarcho-Feminism” of Federica Montseny (1905-1994)**

Born into a family of influential anarchist writers, publishers, reformers and educators, it would seem that Federica Montseny (1905-1994) was indeed predestined for an active and influential career in the political, intellectual, and literary worlds. In fact, historian Mary Nash has noted that, in Spain, Montseny was “sin duda, la mujer anarquista más conocida en el periodo de los años veinte y treinta del siglo veinte” (“Dos intelectuales” 73). Similarly, María Luz Arroyo Vázquez describes Montseny as “una de las figuras protagonistas de la historia de España en el siglo XX…, una activista anarquista que consiguió convertirse en mito” (23, my emphasis). This “mythical” qualifier with which Arroyo labels Montseny is actually indicative of growing critical interest in the life, work, and vast array of fictional and nonfictional literature that this Spanish anarchist produced during what were arguably several of the most tumultuous years in Spain’s modern history:
the decades preceding the Spanish Civil War. Furthermore, while scholars and critics have identified her as an “anarco-feminista” (Prado) and an “anarquista humanista” (Tavera García, “Feminismo” 333), a practitioner of “humanismo feminista” (Tavera Federica, 69), and even “one of the strongest and most outspoken female leaders in Spain” (Mangini, Memories 49), Montseny herself consistently denied the attribution of any feminist label to her person or her ideology. But this denial is paradoxical, ironic even, given that she dedicated the majority of her writing, speaking and advocacy to specifically woman-centered reforms during the years preceding the Spanish Civil War, especially during the 1920s. She became the first woman to occupy a cabinet position in the Spanish government in 1936, upon accepting the position as Minister of Health and Hygiene. Such apparently feminist activity and accomplishments, coupled with her simultaneous denial of feminism, is indeed one of several paradoxes that characterize the enigmatic figure of Montseny (Lozano 15; Tavera, “Federica Montseny” 117). Yet of all the paradoxical and at times outright contradictory elements of this anarchist’s ideological formation, one particular issue stands out as the most complexly theorized within a feminist framework: Montseny’s evaluation of motherhood and maternity.

Before delving into Montseny’s core works like La indomable, “El problema de los sexos,” and various novelas published in the popular anarchist journal, La Revista Blanca, it is essential to address the complexities of Montseny’s relationship with feminism, as well as

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222 Even more contradictory is the fact that this self-professed, anti-institutional anarchist libertarian became the first woman in Spain to occupy a position within the government upon accepting the role of Minister of Health under Largo Caballero in 1936. Alcalde notes that her decision to participate in the formal political structure of the government at this time has perhaps been one of the most controversial and unjustly evaluated (mis)steps of Montseny’s political trajectory (53). Regarding the numerous other paradoxes that critics have pointed out, Lozano eloquently summarizes the perceivable contradictions of Montseny’s life: “Nació en una familia acomodada de intelectuales anarquistas, y fue una de las líderes del más poderoso sindicato obrero, la CNT [Confederación Nacional de Trabajo]; quiso ser escritora, y triunfó como propagandista; denostaba el feminismo, y defendió los derechos de la mujer; amaba su país, y pasó más de la mitad de su vida en el exilio; defendió las ideas más revolucionarias, y vivió muchos años de un sueldo de la organización” (15).
to elaborate the way in which I will deploy the terms “feminist” or “feminism” in my
discussion of this Spanish author. As noted in the introduction, Montseny constantly rejected
the feminist label – from her earliest publications in Spain during the twenties, to her later
articles published in exile in France during the fifties, sixties and even seventies. Perhaps her
most (in)famous and oft-quoted line on the subject is one which appeared in her 1924 essay
“Feminismo y humanismo,” where she states: “¿Feminismo? ¡Jamás! ¡Humanismo siempre!
Propagar un feminismo es fomentar un masculinismo, es crear una lucha inmoral y absurda
entre los dos sexos, que ninguna ley natural tolerarla” (13). Moreover, in this essay she
affirms her belief that in Spain, “no existe feminismo de ninguna clase” (13). She believed
that the problem with most bourgeois feminist movements was their lack of idealism and
coherent ideology (“El movimiento” 4). This was demonstrated by the fact that they strived
only to incorporate women within the status quo, rather than radically change the existing
social order, which was characterized by institutions and codes of conduct that men both
governed and defined (“Feminismo” 13-14). For Montseny, the so-called “problema
feminista” is in actuality a human problem. That is, the issues at stake are of universal
importance as they will affect mankind as a whole, and thus both men and women are
implicated:

Yo creo que la cuestión de los sexos está clara… Igualdad absoluta en todos
los aspectos para los dos; independencia para los dos; capacitación para los
dos; camino libre, amplio y universal para la especie toda. Lo demás es

223 Susanna Tavera adds that, in a personal interview with Montseny (when the Spanish author was well into her
seventies), she continued to passionately invoke this sentiment with the same force that she exuded in her 1920s
articles (Federica Montseny 77).
224 Mary Nash elaborates Montseny’s understanding of feminism “desde el punto de vista humano,” noting that
the anarcho-feminist believed this perspective would place women at the same level as the more general
liberation of human beings of both sexes (“Dos intelectuales” 85-86).
Despite her attempts to present an egalitarian reform agenda, Montseny’s ideas regarding women’s emancipation are inextricably linked to both her individualist understanding of anarchism and her sensitivity to women’s difference. Marlene LeGates’s distinction between liberal (equal-rights) and cultural feminism is again useful in this context. She explains that liberal feminists aim for the creation of a society free of gender distinction, whereas cultural feminists argue that such uniformity fails to challenge existing male values (5-6). As such, cultural feminists define feminism in terms of women’s growing autonomy and they refuse to relinquish the uniqueness of women’s experience (6). Furthermore, LeGates notes that despite the fact that a woman may not self-identify as a feminist, it is possible for contemporary historians and critics to categorize her as feminist based on “her contribution to the process of questioning traditions that subordinated women” (8). In fact, one of Montseny’s key goals was to challenge conventional moral values and traditions, precisely because they were oppressive to women. She admits that resolutions for all human anxieties should begin with attention to the same central concerns and goals: “la transformación de una sociedad injusta y el abandono de una moral y unas preocupaciones que solo han servido para esclavizar a la mujer y desviar a la especie” (“Feminismo” 12). Later, in 1926-27, despite continuous denial of a “feminist” affiliation, Montseny openly declares her support and defense of women: “Nadie ha defendido más a la mujer; nadie siente con más intensidad la solidaridad y el orgullo del sexo; nadie cree más que yo en la personalidad femenina, que ha de ser cada día, que es ya cada día, más firme, recta y clara” (El problema de los sexos 17). Statements such as these demonstrate Montseny’s awareness
of both the patriarchal nature of the current social order, and the importance of promoting women’s awareness of their own subordination in such a way that they will be motivated to actively campaign for change. Consequently, I believe that “feminist,” in the cultural sense that LeGates identifies, is quite applicable to much of Montseny’s thought and advocacy, especially throughout the twenties and prior to the Spanish Civil War.

In addition to “Feminismo y humanismo,” Montseny published articles on feminism and the “problem” of women, including: “La falta de idealidad en la lucha feminista,” “La mujer nueva,” “Las conquistas sociales de la mujer,” and the extensive “La mujer, problema del hombre.” This last title appeared in six parts during the course of one year – between December of 1926 and November of 1927. All six of these essays (each entitled “La mujer, problema del hombre” and distinguished by roman numerals), were compiled and re-published independently as one unit under the title, El problema de los sexos, in Toulouse in 1943, and again in 1951. In these compiled essays, Montseny addresses the controversial topics of “amor libre,” criticizes marriage as an institution, explores her ideas on maternity and motherhood, and elaborates her theory of “individualizamiento,” a concept she believed crucial for empowering women – and mothers – within a progressive Spanish society.

Furthermore, each of Montseny’s three full-length novels – La Victoria (1925), El hijo de Clara (1927), and La indomable (1928) – deals exclusively with issues pertinent to the...
feminist debate and women’s liberation in Spain during the 1920s. Given the appearance of these novels, together with the fact that scholars like Fredricks, Lozano, Nash, Prado, and Tavera have clearly identified the prominence of women’s issues in Montseny’s work with *La Revista Blanca* and in her reformist agenda during this time, in my estimation it is feasible to mark the 1920s as Montseny’s most “feminist” years, at least from a present-day critical standpoint. In accordance with my estimation, Shirley Fredricks has even suggested that feminism is the “essential ingredient” in Montseny’s anarchism (125-45). Antonio Prado employs the term “anarcho-feminist” throughout his study on Montseny and her fellow female anarchist activists and intellectuals. I believe this descriptor is especially appropriate for Federica Montseny, given that it succeeds in distinguishing her from more mainstream, 

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227 Mary Nash believes that the majority of Montseny’s writings on women and women’s issues (el tema de la mujer) is centered exclusively within the twenties, specifically between 1923 and 1929, and that Montseny rarely dedicated time to these so-called feminist questions in the following decades (“Dos intelectuales” 75). Placing a similar timeframe on the concentration of women’s issues within Montseny’s publications, Susanna Tavera also estimates that the most visible pieces of Montseny’s literary oeuvre are precisely those appearing between 1923 and 1930, the majority of which give voice to her attitude towards, and theories about, feminism and “el tema de la mujer” (“Federica Montseny” 117). Tavera states: “Escribió sobre el tema [de la mujer] en su juventud y de hecho los escritos que más visibilidad le dieron en los años 1923-1930 son los que versan sobre feminismo y, así mismo, una serie de tres novelas – *La Victoria, El hijo de Clara,* y *La indomable* –, también sobre el tema ‘mujer’” (117).
largely bourgeois feminist movements of the time, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the
crucial role that both anarchism and feminism played in the formation of her political and
philosophical thought. As such, I will employ the terms “anarcho-feminist” and “anarcho-
feminism” (rather than “feminist” and “feminism”) when referring to Montseny, her literary
production, and her socio-political philosophy.

Federica Montseny was born in Madrid, in 1905, to Juan Montseny and Teresa Mañé,
each of whom were perhaps better known by their respective pseudonyms, Federico Urales
and Soledad Gustavo.²²� Urales and Gustavo were well-known, free-thinking anarchist
reformers in Spain at the turn of the century, and they promoted their individualist anarchist
philosophy in both lectures and print, especially in short articles and novelas published in
popular fin-de-siècle journals. Urales published numerous essays and anarchist propaganda,
was imprisoned for his role in a violent anarchist demonstration in Barcelona, and even
endured a brief period of exile in England before returning to Madrid where he and his wife
would found the anarchist journal La Revista Blanca in 1898 (Langa Laorga 7-8).²²⁹ Gustavo
was a schoolteacher who opened one of the first secular schools in Spain (following the
model proposed by the Italian education reformer María Montessori); she was also a writer
and contributor for several anarchist journals; and she acted as director of La Revista Blanca,

²²� I will refer to Montseny’s parents by their pseudonyms (Gustavo and Urales) for the remainder of this paper,
first to avoid confusion when referring to Federica (Montseny) or her father Juan (Urales), and secondly
because these assumed names consistently appeared in print, especially in La Revista Blanca. In fact, these
monikers were the preferred appellatives of our author’s parents, and her father would even exclusively use his
pseudonym, Federico Urales, in public for the rest of his life (Langa Laorga 8).
²²⁹ La Revista Blanca was an anarchist journal which was published bimonthly and subtitled “Revista de sociología, ciencia y artes.” The journal had two “lives,” which critics like Antonio Prado refer to as the
“primera época” (1898-1905) and the “segunda época” (1923-1936). Susanna Tavera describes the first era of
the anarchist La Revista Blanca (1898-1905), under the direction of Federico Urales and Soledad Gustavo, as
follows: “Escrita en su mayor parte por ambos, marido y mujer, La Revista Blanca estableció un estilo nuevo de
prensa militante que alcanzó la aprobación de su público… Juntos, también, pusieron los Urales las bases de
una pequeña empresa familiar y militante, que editaba suplementos y otras revistas o traducciones del
anarquismo internacional” (“Federica Montseny” 114). The second era of this journal thrived under
the direction of Federica Montseny herself, and the details of this “segunda época” will be explored in depth
throughout the remainder of this chapter.
since her husband remained “legalmente desterrado” during the first years of this journal’s publication (8-9). Urales and Gustavo would publish *La Revista Blanca* biweekly in Madrid until 1905, at which point the journal would begin a nearly 18 year hiatus until its second era of publication began in Barcelona in 1923, at the urging of the couple’s young daughter, Federica. Inevitably, her parents’ libertarian ideology and passionate adscription to anarchist principles exerted an enormous influence over Montseny as a future writer, activist, and reformer.\(^{230}\) Through her own autobiography, *Mis primeros cuarenta años* (1987), as well as several personal interviews she willingly provided before her death, Montseny herself makes clear the roles that both her mother and father played in her upbringing and in the evolution of her personal consciousness.\(^{231}\) However, Montseny’s relationship with her mother, as well as the unique female camaraderie she experienced from spending time with her mother’s close friend and fellow anarchist, Teresa Claramunt, her aunt Carmen and her cousin Elisa (the latter of whom lived in Urales’s communal-style farming estate), surely impacted this anarcho-feminist author’s viewpoints on women and feminism.\(^{232}\)

Montseny was largely an autodidact who read any (and nearly all) of the books in her parents’ private home library. However she credits her mother with affording her an

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\(^{230}\) Langa Laorga even suggests that “no se podría entender la figura de Federica Montseny sin reconstruir las biografías de sus progenitores” (7). While the early life experiences of Urales and Gustavo were certainly instrumental in shaping the education and perhaps even the trajectory of Montseny’s literary output and political involvement, this chapter will not elaborate on the details of Urales’s and Gustavo’s lives prior to Montseny’s birth in 1905. For biographical information on Juan Montseny (Federico Urales) and Teresa Mañé (Soledad Gustavo), see Lango Laorga’s introduction to Federica Montseny’s *La indomable* (7-20). For further information regarding the first era of *La Revista Blanca* and the important roles of Urales and Gustavo in the anarchist (and anarcho-feminist) movement of the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, see Antonio Prado’s chapter, “*La Revista Blanca*, primera época (1898-1905): Amor y re/degeneración: Soledad Gustavo y Federico Urales” (47-106). Susanna Tavera, in her recent biography of Montseny, also dedicates an entire chapter to late nineteenth century anarchism and the life experiences of Gustavo and Urales in this context (*Federica Montseny* 43-61).

\(^{231}\) See Alcalde and Núñez Esteban and Samblancat Miranda for transcripts and excerpts from personal interviews given by Montseny.

\(^{232}\) Langa Laorga explains that Federica in fact grew up surrounded by her grandparents, aunt, cousin and parents, and together the family was maintained by their minimal agrarian economy (16-17).
extensive, libertarian education: “En realidad mi maestra fue mi madre. De niña nunca fui a la escuela primaria ni a la secundaria” (qtd. in Alcalde 37). She describes this “non-traditional” Spanish education in her memoirs: “La base principal, el método pedagógico de mi madre consistía esencialmente en despertar mi curiosidad, remitiéndome a las lecturas que podían ampliar mis conocimientos… Ningún límite tuve en mis lecturas. Lo pude leer todo y leí, por lo menos, todo lo que tuve a mi alcance” (Montseny, Mis primeros 23). She recalls reading the Bible, Darwin, Spencer, Dumas, Zola, Kropotkin, Bakunin, the Russian novelists Tolstoi and Dostoievsky, and Spanish authors including Cervantes, Blasco Ibáñez, Pardo Bazán, Galdós, and Clarín, to name a few (Montseny, Mis primeros 23; Núñez Esteban and Samblancat Miranda 185). The result of such an immediate and multifaceted process of erudition, which her own educated, liberal mother provided her, was a young, perceptive Federica who began to approach the society that surrounded her with a critical eye from a very early age (Gustavo was herself a vocal critic of invasive social institutions like “El código matrimonial” and a proponent of the anarchist concept of “amor libre”)\(^{233}\). At a mere eighteen years of age, the year 1923 marked a crucial point in the maturation of Montseny’s public identity. In this same year, Spain experienced the beginning of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, and Montseny officially joined the anarchist organization, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT), and subsequently urged her parents to reestablish publication of \textit{La Revista Blanca} in Barcelona. As the second era of this popular anarchist journal began,

\(^{233}\) Prado elaborates Gustavo’s 1898 critique of “El código matrimonial” (65-70) particularly her opposition to it on the grounds of what she perceived to be “una legislación del Estado construida para proteger el derecho del más fuerte, y que por tanto, en material del matrimonio y divorcio, la ley sigue siendo un obstáculo para el amor” (67). Regarding the concept of “amor libre” as embraced by Urales and Gustavo, see Prado (79-105). Prado’s account emphasizes the way in which \textit{La Revista Blanca}’s anarchist philosophy on this polemic issue (at least during the first era of publication, 1898-1905) differed significantly from both bourgeois feminism and anarchist neomalthusianism, in the sense that love (“el amor”) was considered above either political or sexual strategies (79-80). In general, the anarchist philosophy promoted by \textit{La Revista Blanca} accepted that “la sociedad esclaviza el amor, tanto a las mujeres como a los hombres” (80).
Montseny became one of the chief editors and most frequent contributors to both the main journal itself, and also to its ancillary biweekly series of novelas, *La Novela Ideal* and *La Novela Libre*. From this moment on, Montseny would greatly increase her public presence and visibility in political organizations, intellectual circles, and especially the literary world.

During the 1920s, she published three novels during a span of only five years (*La victoria*, *El hijo de Clara*, and *La indomable*), all the while continuing to publish essays and novelas for *La Revista Blanca*. Despite the spotlight which would imminently shine upon her, Montseny recalls the challenges she faced as a young female novelist associated with anarchist (or anarcho-feminist) ideals at this particular historical moment:

> Los siete años de dictadura fueron un período durante el que toda propaganda oral fue suprimida. Las reuniones y los plenos eran clandestinos, y la actuación de los militantes confederales y libertarios muy limitada [...]

> Durante este período, además de las novelas, “Ideales” y “Libres”, que escribí, redacté dos, que levantaron mucho revuelo en nuestros medios: *La Victoria*, seguida de *El Hijo de Clara*. Abordaba en ellas el tema de la libertad femenina, que suscitó grandes discusiones y polémicas. No eran muchos los hombres que en aquellos años… aceptasen algunas de las premisas por mí sentadas. (Montseny, *Mis primeros* 42)

As Montseny herself clearly acknowledges, “la libertad femenina” was a crucial – and controversial – issue driving the impulse behind the expression of her developing social consciousness, yet she still resisted the term “feminism.” Clearly, Montseny’s relationship to feminism as both a historical and a political movement has been nothing short of polemic. In reality, she was most closely associated with anarchism, and with feminism by virtue of her
individualist imperatives which did not discriminate based on gender. Yet the libertarian
nature of anarchism inherently provided a female activist like Montseny with the opportunity
to express her most revolutionary ideas, each of which challenged the political power
wielded by hegemonic social and political organizations and institutions (all notably
patriarchal in nature, as well). Anarchism, like socialism, was indeed appealing to leftist
women, as these particular ideologies offered them a seemingly equal position alongside men
in an entirely different, radically restructured society (Scanlon 243). While socialism and
anarchism may have approached the place of women in Spanish society from multiple
vantage points, these leftist parties, in theory, were committed to ending the continued
subordination of women. Ackelsberg points out that these movements “opposed what they
took to be the prevailing ‘bourgeois feminist’ position that the key to overcoming women’s
subordination was the vote” (“Women” 4). The opposition to bourgeois feminist goals is an
important point of entry into Montseny’s “anarcho-feminist” ideology, and she openly
expressed disdain for feminism as a political party (“partido”) due to the fact that it appeared
“burgués hasta la médula” (Montseny, “El movimieto” 3).

When it came to the issue of maternity (and women’s sexual freedom) in Spain,
however, the anarchists were divided. Prado explains that Montseny subscribed to “anarco-
individualismo,” which promoted social change through the radical transformation of the
individual (120). In particular, and as prerequisites for this social change, anarcho-
individualism proposed “una regeneración individual a todos niveles: moral, política y física”
(120). This individualist agenda existed alongside, or in opposition to, “anarco-sindicalismo,”
which focused instead on the demands of workers as a collective, and the mobilization of the
masses in order to paralyze the institutional forces of the country for the purpose of inciting a
social revolution (120). While Montseny did support some tenets of “anarco-sindicalismo,” especially during the thirties, she was generally suspicious of any officially recognized, collective organization on principle. Additionally, anarcho-syndicalist groups in general tended to promote a eugenics-based concept of birth control rooted in a Neomalthusian agenda. According to these anarchist groups, who shared many basic concerns with the eighteenth-century propositions of the Reverent Thomas Robert Malthus, population growth should be limited, especially within working class families.234 Limiting family size was considered a means of ensuring resources for current and future generations, as well as a manner of promoting strong, healthy families that would not be weakened by limited financial resources or enslaved by excessive factory labor. These anarchists believed that stronger, healthier families with fewer restraints on their resources could more effectively challenge authority.235 While the neomalthusian agenda of the anarcho-syndicates fell out of

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234 In 1798, the Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus published an essay entitled *Essay on the Principles of Population*, in which he argued that population would continue to increase at a rate beyond that of the means of subsistence (Hall 142). To avoid the dire consequences of such demographic expansion, Malthus advocated population control, principally by means of sexual restraint or delayed marriage, rather than artificial methods of contraception (142). Hall also notes that the twentieth-century “revisionist usage” of Malthusianism, “neo-malthusianism,” was often used as a euphemism for artificial contraception, which was in fact far from the initial meaning associated with the term (141). See Brian Dolan’s *Malthus, Medicine & Morality: Malthusianism after1798* for more information on Malthus, Malthusianism and Neomalthusianism. Dolan makes clear in his introduction that “malthusianism” has been a persistent term throughout the past two hundred years, yet its meaning has always been variable: “The warnings of overpopulation issued by Malthus have been uncritically cited as historical and scientific underpinnings to twentieth-century debates on population, social medicine and welfare, birth control, support for the developing world, and so on… Strangely Malthus has been occasionally considered an early advocate of birth control” (4-5).

235 Prado explains that of the two branches of Spanish anarchism which existed in the late nineteenth- and earlier twentieth-centuries, “anarco-sindicalismo” (concerned primarily with the plight of the working class and the demands of workers) and “anarco-individualismo” (concerned with promoting change by radically transforming the individual; Montseny falls in this category), the former group exhibited a neomalthusian informed agenda (120). Their principal objective was to boycott the most powerful social institutions, mainly the Church and State (123). In order to do so more effectively, “anarco-sindicalista” propaganda, represented best by the *fin-de-siècle* journal *Salud y Fuerza*, advocated smaller families for the working class: “la clase obrera debería tener menos hijos para así no ser enviados a las guerras entre Estados, a las cárcel, a las fábricas, a las escuelas, a las iglesias” (123). Furthermore, the reduction in future workers would mitigate hunger and misery, thus making the working class more robust, and more inclined to participate in a social revolution (123). This interpretation of neomalthusianism was absent from the discourse on motherhood and reproduction which characterized *La Revista Blanca*, the main instrument of propaganda for anarcho-
favor by 1914 with the start of the First World War (Prado 124), this controversial philosophy did not entirely disassociate from anarchism. When asked in an interview about how she incorporated and presented maternity in her novels, Montseny responded a bit defensively, taking care to clearly distinguish her libertarian position – or her anarcho-feminist vision – from that of the anarchists who supported a neomalthusian agenda:

Nunca fui neomalthusiana. Apoyaba la limitación de los nacimientos y la maternidad consciente y controlada, que fue lo que intenté llevar a la práctica en el 36 con la ley de interrupción artificial del embarazo, pero no neomalthusianismo que significaba la renuncia a la maternidad considerando que era una esclavitud para la mujer, y una forma de continuar el orden social. Nosotros opinábamos que así el orden social no se perpetuaría, pero tampoco la vida, por lo que no éramos partidarios del neomaltusianismo a secas. Nosotros lo que verdaderamente queríamos era crear el hombre del futuro. Esta es la posición de la protagonista de mi novela _El hijo de Clara_ y es la línea de la obra realizada por _La Novela Ideal_ y _La Novela Libre_. (qtd. in Núñez Esteban and Samblancat Miranda 184)

Montseny’s desire to create the men and women of the future is a recurrent theme not only in her maternal discourse, but also in her anarcho-feminist principles. Though she encouraged voluntary motherhood, she did not promote birth control or even the refusal of motherhood.236 The individualist philosophy she presents in _La indomable_, as well as in

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236 In interviews with Alcalde, for example, she states: “Considero que, como partidaria de la libertad, la mujer tiene que disponer de sí misma. Si quiere abortar, ¿por qué se le tiene que impedir? … Yo he querido tener hijos y he tenido tres. Ahora, si hubiera pensado que no quería, pues no los hubiera tenido. Por ejemplo, Emma Goldman, no quería tenerlos y se hizo operar, se hizo girar la matriz, porque creía que los hijos le hubieran impedido llevar la vida de militante que llevó. Y es posible. A mí no me lo impidieron” (Alcalde 46).
essays like “La mujer nueva,” prioritizes futurity over the present moment. The present, Montseny believed, was ultimately flawed, and thus a successful, improved future would only be possible through children. To ensure the existence of this new generation, then, at least some women must desire to become mothers.

In 1936, Montseny accepted a position within Largo Caballero’s government as Minister of Health and Hygiene. During her brief appointment (from 1936-37), she worked to pass legislation which would benefit working-class women and mothers. She even drafted a law which would legalize abortion in all of Spain: “El derecho a la interrupción artificial del embarazo” (Alcalde 58). Her motivation for creating this bill, however, was not driven by her desire to afford women the right to terminate pregnancy as a means of controlling and limiting their offspring, but rather by her concern for women’s health and mortality. At this time, women frequently died or suffered infection or mutilation from illegal abortions and medical malpractice. Montseny considered it a basic individual right that a woman should be able to enter “cualquier clínica o hospital” and request an abortion if she so desired, and if her health permitted (58). As Minister, she cooperated with the anarchist women’s group “Mujeres Libres,” which was formed in April of 1936, to address those women’s concerns which anarchism had failed to resolve. A prominent female organization in the political

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237 In her discussion of the Montseny’s proposed “ley del aborto,” Carmen Alcalde again points out that the insistence that she was not feminist appears at odds with the realities of Montseny’s “feminist” reforms and incorporation of women’s issues into her agenda as Minister of Health and Hygiene (58).
238 According to María Asunción Gómez’s article, “Feminism and Anarchism: Remembering the Role of Mujeres Libres in the Spanish Civil War,” “Contrary to bourgeois feminism, “Mujeres Libres” attempted to raise the consciousness of the working woman and to integrate her into a social and individual revolution without precedent in working-class history. In contrast to other types of proletarian women associations, such as the Communist Asociación de Mujeres Antifascistas and the Socialist Unión de Muchachas (United Girls), “Mujeres Libres” advocated an associative feminism striving for total freedom for women within a global revolutionary process that placed great emphasis on female bonding” (306). See Mary Nash’s, Mujeres Libres for information on this women’s organization and its goals, reach, and impact, as well as for articles and essays written by several of the most vocal members. See also Martha A. Ackelsberg’s article “Separate and Equal?” and her book Free Women of Spain, each of which thoroughly analyze the role of “Mujeres Libres” not only
scene, “Mujeres Libres” would last until 1939, expanding to include over 20,000 members in various parts of the Spanish Republic (Nash, *Mujeres* 7). While she herself was never an official member of this group, Montseny nevertheless approved of much of its feminist agenda. In particular, she respected and supported the group’s attention to the plight of the female working class, its focus on improved sexual education, and its desire for women to have absolute control over their reproductive potential.\(^{239}\) Nash explains that “Mujeres Libres” was the first organization in Spain to critically analyze women’s issues from a point of view informed by class: “es decir: la liberación femenina desde la perspectiva de la emancipación de la clase obrera, que podemos denominar *feminismo proletario* por contraposición a los movimientos feministas de carácter burgués” (*Mujeres* 8).

Concerning her personal life, like the other two women in this study, Montseny was also a mother, and she even experienced periods of single motherhood at certain moments in her life.\(^{240}\) She married fellow anarchist Germinal Esgleas in a civil ceremony in 1930, and they couple had three children: Vida, born in 1933; Germinal in 1938, and Blanca in 1942. Despite motherhood, Montseny continued to be extremely active in the public sphere.\(^{241}\) During the 1930s, she became increasingly involved in politics, especially with the establishment of the Spanish Second Republic. When it became clear that Spain was entering

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\(^{239}\) Montseny admits that anarchism was unable to address all the issues which were important to women, and that “Mujeres Libres” was likely born of this deficiency: “Había problemas específicos, es cierto, que el anarquismo no resolvía, porque hay problemas que sólo puede discutir la mujer, como los mismos que ahora se discuten: el aborto, la prostitución, etc.” (qtd. in Alcalde 46).

\(^{240}\) Her husband was extremely politically active in the anarchist movement occurring in Catalonia, and he was frequently away giving lectures, publishing, and participating in radical demonstrations. In the post-Civil War years, he would be imprisoned on several occasions, and Montseny took responsibility for the care of her children, parents, and mother-in-law.

\(^{241}\) Langa Laorga notes that Montseny had extensive familial support, especially from her mother, to assist her with childcare while both she and her husband spent time traveling in Spain and abroad: “La posibilidad de crear una familia y de compatibilizar las tareas hogareñas con el resto de sus actividades se debe, sin lugar a dudas, a ese sistema de núcleo familiar ampliado” (28).
a period of fascist dictatorship under the Franco regime, she and her family went into exile in France. They were able to cross the border in 1939 with the help of Montseny’s diplomatic passport, which she earned from her position with the Republican government, but the passage was not an easy one. Montseny crossed with her two young children and her elderly mother, whose health was rapidly declining (she would die shortly after the journey in Perpignan). Her husband, Germinal, would reunite with the family in France several months later. In France, however, the couple was in constant danger of recognition, and petitions for Montseny’s extradition caused her to maintain a low profile. Federica and Germinal even experienced a brief period of imprisonment, but her third pregnancy prevented her forceful extradition to Spain (Langa Laorga 35). Montseny would spend the remainder of her life in France, in both Paris and Toulouse, constantly publishing articles for the French journal, “L’Espoir.” Alcalde affirms that Montseny “nunca calló después de la Guerra Civil… Día tras día su hermosa voz ha cruzado la espina dorsal de toda Francia…” (11). She would return to Spain for only brief periods of visitation after the fall of the dictatorship, but she would reside predominantly in Toulouse until her death there in 1989.

Incorporating Motherhood within an Individualist Model of Woman: La indomable (1928)

Una salvajilla… Una pequeña zulú… Pequeño Hércules femenino… Fierecilla… Diamante en bruto… Potrita… Pura, sana, virgen, inocente; fiera… Indomable (50-66). These are among the multitudinous descriptors referring to Vida, the young protagonist of Federica Montseny’s semi-autobiographical novel, La indomable (1928). Perhaps the most critically appreciated of Montseny’s narratives, our anarcho-feminist author composed this
commercially successful tale when she was a mere twenty-one years of age. The cover of the novel’s second edition boasts a revealing subtitle: “Historia de un gran temperamento, de una gran existencia, de una gran pasión. En ella se crea un carácter y se plantea un drama profundo y emocionante de desplazamiento y de inadaptación” (qtd. in Tavera, *Federica* 1). The juxtaposition of the positive connotations behind the phrases “gran temperamento” and “gran existencia,” with the rather negative, restrictive nuances of “desplazamiento” and “inadaptación,” alludes to the conflictive demands of the anarcho-feminist philosophy Montseny elaborates in this novel. However, the greatest conflict which the text explores is the actual degree of individual “freedom” (*libertad*) available specifically to women in contemporary Spanish society. In this “libertarian novel,” as Núñez Ronchi terms it (200), it becomes apparent that Montseny’s faith in an anarcho-individualism built upon a humanist philosophy, coupled with her continued acknowledgement and celebration of uniquely female qualities and experiences (namely maternity and motherhood), in fact leads her to a theoretical impasse in which she is forced to recognize the feminist threads of her own philosophy. Specifically, her conviction that maternity is a woman’s voluntary decision, yet also her most fulfilling and noble act of self-realization, proves problematic for the individualism she espouses as an anarchist.

Throughout the twenties, when Montseny would compose the majority of her literature on women, she articulates an individualist stance, predicated on immediate praxis for the purpose of an improved future society. In order to thoroughly understand the characterization of Vida, *La indomable*’s protagonist, it is necessary to consider Montseny’s definitions of *individualizamiento* and of the ideal modern woman (or the “mujer moderna,” “mujer nueva,” or “mujer futura” as she refers to her at various moments). First, Montseny’s
concept of individualizamiento offers what she believed to be a possible solution to “el mutuo problema de los sexos” (El problema 24). Individualizamiento posits that intimate relationships between men and women should be based on “amor sin convivencia, amor mantenido perpetuamente en su grato período de primavera, renovado o no, según el gusto de cada uno” (24). Marriage, she believed, was “el mayor adversario del amor… la tumba del amor” (20). But successfully adhering to this new principle would require, “necesariamente… la desaparación del hogar” (22). Furthermore – and here we will see Montseny encounter the “dilemma of difference” in her individualist discourse – in order for daily living in the private sphere to become less restrictive and hierarchical, an entirely new structure of relations would need to be established.

This dramatic social transition would depend not only on the complete and total transformation of the present socio-cultural order (“la transformación del presente orden de cosas”), but more importantly on the appearance of an entirely new woman: “Para esa desaparición y para ese individualizamiento, nos será preciso contar con un nuevo tipo de mujer que no sea el tipo de la mujer corriente. Y en ese momento empieza a feminizarse el problema; es decir, a ser de la exclusiva incumbencia de nosotras” (22). Nevertheless, she implicates men in this new form of social change as well: “Porque, si para ese individualizamiento del amor es preciso contar con un nuevo tipo femenino, tampoco el tipo masculino corriente ofrece las condiciones precisas para llevarlo a cabo” (26-27). For Montseny, then, individualism meant that each individual, male or female, must be aware of

242 At another moment in El problema de los sexos, she elaborates: “El tipo de lo que estimo debería ser la mujer futura… la mujer debe convencerse de que el matrimonio legalizado o la unión libre, cualquier norma reguladora del amor y basada en la convivencia, es perjudicial para ella… El cónyuge sumiso casi siempre es la mujer… La primera condición en que ha de basarse la nueva personalidad femenina es la salud del alma y del cuerpo. Sobre ella ha de consolidar la mujer el edificio de su personalidad, de su fuerza creadora mental y física, de su sensibilidad, de su amor a lo bello y a lo bueno, del sentimiento de su dignidad y del uso y disfrute de una libertad que nada ni nadie han de enajenarle…” (27-28).
and acknowledge their own right to personal freedom: “Porque si la mujer consciente y libre no existe, o existe raramente, tan raro como ella es el hombre libre y consciente” (5). In her contemporary society, Montseny lamented the fact that neither ordinary men nor ordinary women were capable of comprehending and practicing individualizamiento, and she placed her faith and advocacy in those individuals who might behave extraordinarily, with a focus on the future. Importantly, Montseny’s consistent use of gender specific language throughout her essays (femenino/masculino, mujer/hombre, feminizarse/masculinarse), as well as her insistence that women must be the first to bravely effectuate this new lifestyle, reveals that she indeed remained cognizant of sexual differences.

The recognition of “difference” brings us to a second important component of Montseny’s anarcho-feminist agenda, and an element which will factor heavily into the analysis of La indomable: the ideal modern woman. According to Montseny’s stipulations, the new female standard must be self-created and free of all traditional social and institutional pressures: “Imagínémonos un tipo autocreable de mujer” (El problema 29). Realizing self-created womanhood, she acknowledges, will be an extraordinarily challenging feat: “Es precisa una creación personal e íntima, una autodidaxia, una autovivificación femenina. No creo en Pigmaliones creadores de mujeres ideales… [E]s preciso un sembrador singular y sutil, un maestro en una ciencia nueva, un ser quizá inencontrable y semidivino…” (17). Historians have recognized that Nietzsche was behind Montseny’s concept of voluntarism and individualism, especially given that the philosopher was one of her acknowledged favorite authors (Kern, Red Years 76).243 Yet in her theorization of Nietzschean concepts (such as the Übermensch, Zarathustra), our anarcho-feminist remained

243 In addition to Robert Kern, Susanna Tavera (Federica Montseny) and Catherin Davies (Spanish Women’s Writing) have also pointed to the influence of Nietzsche on Montseny’s individualist, or anarcho-feminist, philosophy.
keenly aware of the way in which gender factored in to the individual’s potential to embody such radically individualist principles. Catherine Davies recognizes Montseny’s recognition of gender differentiation in her interpretation of this concept, positing that she believed women, unlike men, “constituted a powerful, lyrical and emotional force, a vital dynamic of their own which was closely connected to their natural ability to create new life and sufficiently powerful to bring about great change” (Spanish Women’s Writing 151). That is, women could realize the need to revise their own roles through creation – whether by way of art, literature, or, as we will come to understand, even maternity.

Further informing Montseny’s vision was the work of Russian anarchist Michael Bakunin. Specifically, Montseny adhered to the notion that the active, voluntary participation of the individual (again, male or female) was crucial to the creation of an entirely new, revolutionary future. In a second essay, “La mujer nueva,” for example, she explicitly describes her vision of this exemplary liberated woman: “Una mujer-mujer, no mujer-hombre ni mujer-hembra. Una mujer-mujer, no criatura sin personalidad ni sexo. Una mujer orgullosa y segura de sí misma, con plena conciencia de que en ella están los destinos y el porvenir de la raza humana. Una mujer creadora de hombres y no imitadora” (25). This woman of the future must recognize and exercise her rights as both a woman and a mother:

244 Robert Kern has noted that Bakunin’s ideas were especially well suited to Spain, given that the Russian anarchist suggested that the separation between the rural and urban proletariats should come to an end so that these two groups might unite in a common goal (Red Years 19). Bakunin had argued against Karl Marx’s “dictatorship of the proletariat,” insisting that such a “dictatorship” would end up being composed of technicians and intellectuals whose power would then by offset by the inclusion of antagonistic, peasant masses (19). Bakunin also criticized Marx’s “dictatorship of the proletariat” for affording freedom only to a few; he instead argued that in a new society, “state religion, monarchy, classes, and the state itself would be abolished” (19). He proposed in its place an elected judiciary and a long list of individual rights for humanity as a whole (20). Kern believes that few other political philosophers had ever made “so total a claim for the rights of humanity,” largely due to the fact that for Bakunin, only individual freedom was able to defend and ensure social liberty (20). The Bakunian notion that human beings had the capacity to develop the use of their faculties to the fullest, given a humane environment (20), clearly influenced Montseny’s thoughts on (feminist) individualism. See Kern’s Red Years / Black Years for more information on the influence of Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin, as opposed to Marxist principles, on the Spanish anarchists (19-25).
she has the right to choose whether to marry, when or if she desires children, how many children she can afford to have, and even who will father those children. By placing these rights, and this paradigm of womanhood, strategically in a proximate future, Montseny recognizes the extreme challenges of the present moment which render many of her concepts unrealistic, yet she remains optimistic that the pace of socio-cultural progress will be such that these ideals may one day flourish. The emphasis on futurity, placed within the context of *individualizamiento*, as we shall see, allows Montseny to accommodate the paradoxical, often contradictory elements of her thought within a coherent anarcho-feminist agenda.

In *La indomable*, the symbolically named protagonist, Vida, in fact embodies both this evolving theory of individualism and the “mujer-moderna” archetype. Her evocative name immediately suggests vitality, drive, and dynamism. She is strong-willed and an individualist, insisting even as a young adolescent that she will both think and live entirely for herself (66). Importantly, while Montseny has acknowledged that this narrative is “más o menos autobiográfico” (*Mis primeros* 42), Langa Laorga rightly reminds us that Vida, the fictional protagonist, is not identical to Federica, the real, historical individual: “Vida es una *mujer ideal*, desligada de cualquier atadura que coarte su poder de decisión respecto a sí misma y a la elección de sus pautas de conducta” (41, emphasis original). Nevertheless, there are clear moments in this novel in which Montseny draws heavily on her own personal

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245 Shirley Fredericks expands on some of the more iconoclast of Montseny’s “rights to maternity”: “[Montseny] insists also on a woman’s right to choose the father (or fathers) of those children. She maintains that pregnancy is solely a woman’s responsibility (contrary to much feminist thinking today) and that a woman is obligated to know and to understand how her own body functions in order to control her pregnancy. Montseny says that the prime responsibility for the care of children falls inevitably and naturally on the mother, a pattern she observed among animals during her childhood. Therefore, a woman must be trained to provide adequately for her offspring through an education, skill, or profession by which she can earn an honorable living…The crux of the matter is knowledge about reproduction and responsible use of that knowledge.” (*Federica Montseny* 5).

246 Despite her own acknowledgement, Langa Laorga provides extensive footnotes throughout her edition of *La indomable* in which she draws parallels to the characters in the novel and real, historical figures with whom Montseny interacts. Susanna Tavera also summarizes instances of “coincidence” between the life of Montseny and that of *La indomable*’s fictional protagonist: “la única en que Federica traza un evidente autorretrato suyo” (*Federica* 87-89).
experiences, and even voices her own anarcho-feminist theories through her semi-autobiographical spokeswoman, Vida. Vida receives a libertarian education from her parents; she grows up on a farm with her extended family; and her parents are active social reformers and anarchist publishers. Vestiges of Montseny are especially visible in those instances when the protagonist steadfastly defends her decisions, or muses over the possibilities presented to her as a woman. Yet problematically, this “mujer moderna” struggles to resolve the “dilemma of difference” on her path to individual freedom. As such, Montseny’s final narrative reveals the challenges facing her vision of an ideal modern woman – a “superwoman,” or an admirable “sobre-humano” as one character in the novel describes her in Nietzschean terms (85) – should she wish to engage in motherhood as a means of fulfilling her individual subjectivity.

In numerous instances, Vida demonstrates her ability to freely determine her own destiny by rejecting what many may perceive to be ideal circumstances for a young woman of her aptitude. As a teenager she is offered a prestigious scholarship to study abroad in Belgium, but with the stipulation that she must first be baptized. Rather than conform to this demand, lest she be disqualified from consideration, Vida professes her steadfast individualism by refusing the offer: “Soy yo la que, voluntariamente y con indignación, renuncio a la beca y a Bélgica, porque quieren hacérmela pagar demasiado cara. ¡Nada menos que a cambio de mi dignidad!” (70). Vida will not compromise her ideas or her freedom, and she believed accepting the exigencies of the scholarship would threaten her individual liberty. She explains to her professor: “Seré siempre yo. Me propongo ser fiel a mí misma… y no dejarme nunca, nunca, vencer por la sociedad. No seré nada quizá. Pero, no siendo nada, seré lo que nunca podrá ser usted: un ser libre, que ni se compra ni se vende, al
que se podrá matar, pero al que en buena lid no se vencerá” (71). Her refusal to conform to societal demands and pressures is consistent. When she obtains a job writing for a journal in Barcelona, her editors suggest that she modify her writings: “Señorita, es usted muy atrevida en material de amor […] que muchas veces he dudado fuesen suyos los artículos que me envía. ¡Es usted tan joven! ¡Veinte años! […] Mas hay cosas que en una señorita no están bien” (93). Again, Vida cannot be persuaded to change, and this time she rallies against the suggestion that it is her gender which renders her themes inappropriate: “Jamás pienso ni en mi sexo, ni en mi estado, ni en mi edad para tratarlos” (93). She stubbornly refuses to continue working with the journal, taking the opportunity to identify the way in which the cultural and social codes of conduct in Spain stifle her personal freedom as a woman: “Me olvidaba del país donde nací… Todo el mundo deberá cambiar de carácter antes que cambie yo. De modo que será más fácil que España entera esté de acuerdo conmigo, que no que yo me ponga de acuerdo con España” (94).

Vida’s individualist, and anarcho-feminist attitude is consistent with the aforementioned monikers of resistance and rebellion which secondary characters apply to her, but it also demonstrates her willingness to self-educate and determine her own personal and professional paths. This protagonist is especially representative of Montseny’s “future-woman,” herself a “heroic rebel,” as Kern terms Montseny’s conception of a radical, Nietzschean-inspired individualist (Red Years 77). This notion of the individual who prioritizes the self beyond everything else, sacrificing even that which society values as good or desirable, is especially revolutionary because it rejects contemporary societal values and institutions and opts instead to concentrate on the forward momentum of progress, the future, and the self. As one of Montseny’s role models, the Russian anarchist Emma Goldman and
friend of the Montseny family firmly believed, women must free themselves not only from external constraints, but from those internal limitations provoked by fear of violating them:

“Sólo cuando la mujer se libre del temor del qué dirá la gente se podrá emancipar verdaderamente” (Scanlon 255). Yet to behave according to this logic in the Spain of the twenties would certainly render a woman a social outcast. Montseny appears to be aware of this double-bind within her own idealistic vision, given that she repeatedly characterizes her protagonist with antagonistic adjectives that highlight her nonconformist comportment. Practically speaking, the course of action which Vida takes in La indomable is far-removed from the reality of most Spanish women’s lives, and thus she is best interpreted emblematically as a liberated, female sentinel. As Vida progresses through her fictional life, her experiences effectively serve as cautionary warnings regarding the potential dilemmas which individualist women might face en route to self-fulfillment and complete emancipation in Spain. Thus while Vida’s status as an untamable social outcast insistent on blazing her own trail, yet managing the consequences only in the future, may function within the confines of Montseny’s fictional narrative, Spanish women readers were left to contemplate practical resolutions to what was essentially the dramatization of their own maternal dilemma in an inaugural protagonist.

When it comes to decisions regarding her personal life – love, marriage, and a potential family – Vida encounters the most salient obstacle en route to her own personal freedom by way of individualizamiento. For even the most educated, “revolutionary” or free-thinking men cannot comprehend that a woman should desire to live such a seemingly solitary life. This conflict is made especially clear when the issue of motherhood surfaces. At “una de esas charlas colectivas,” Vida becomes involved in an ongoing conversation between
a young, educated couple: “Hablaban del neomalthusianismo. Una mujer, profesora y unida a
un joven médico naturista, expresó su firme voluntad de no tener hijo alguno” (132). Vida
is shocked by this stance, which voluntarily turns its back on the mother-role for which she
has the utmost respect. Here, we see a clear instance of Montseny voicing her opinions and
ideas through her protagonist. In *El problema de los sexos*, Montseny admits that the decision
to bear children is often a difficult one for many women, who may perhaps view maternity
and motherhood as obstacles. But she nevertheless implies that the ideal, free and modern
woman – her future woman – would make the choice in favor of motherhood: “El obstáculo
embarazante son los hijos. Habrá quien lo solucionaría, suprimiéndolos. No soy yo de esa
opinión. Los hijos representan mañana la garantía sentimental, y en esta sociedad también
económica, de nuestra vida” (Montseny, *El problema* 28). For Vida, as for Montseny,
motherhood constituted a crucial component of womanhood. Nevertheless, while it may be
biologically and corporeally plausible, the ambitious self-defined moral code of this future
woman renders such a lofty aspiration ethically impossible:

> Ser madre quiere decir hacer, con sangre de nuestra sangre y carne de nuestra
carne, un hombre o una mujer futuros. Ser madre quiere decir sufrir,
sacrificarse, vivir, amar, eternizarse en una obra de ideal. Ser madre quiere
decir crear en propia carne, realizar de nosotros mismos, aproximarnos, ¿qué
digo? superar la obra mitológica de las divinidades. Los dioses creaban
fráamente, animaban barros, daban apariencia humana a bloques de tierra, a

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247 Malthus, whose ideas informed 18th and 19th century Malthusianism as well as 20th century
Neomalthusianism, advocated deliberate, methodical population control through natural forms of “birth control”
delayed marriages, sexual restraint) which might ensure sufficient resources for the well-being of humanity
(See Dolan and Hall). Thus Malthus’s discourse on “choice” did not mesh with Montseny’s; The former
preferred the conscious limitation or even rejection of reproduction, whereas the latter advocated motherhood
and procreation as proactive decisions which women should make at (what they determine to be) an appropriate
moment.
nada supremo y amado. Las madres son más que los dioses: crean de sí mismas, crean en sí mismas y sufren y aman y pueden morir al crear. ¡Ser madre! ¡Oh!, ¿qué es la más perfecta obra literaria, el cuadro más bellísimo, la más sublime escultura, ante la obra de carne y sangre, la obra ardiente, forma, pensamiento y alma de un hijo? (132)

Vida’s monologue here reveals that she considers women’s maternal capacity to be fundamental on two levels. First, it ensures the future of humanity in general, and also of the individual woman herself, who is essentially immortalized in her child. In fact, this idea of eternalizing the individual woman, as well as the national or domestic “family” through maternity, is representative of a recurring trend identified by Allen within first-wave maternal feminism. Secondly, maternity is perceived as a uniquely female art form: the child is “una obra,” comparable to the most perfect, beautiful work of literature, painting or sculpture. Taken together, these two facets of Vida’s libertarian notion of motherhood reflect the common fin-de-siècle and early twentieth-century desires of male writers and philosophers to eternalize the self by way of their aesthetic or philosophical contributions.

Women, however, did not participate to such an extent in this same intellectual scene (due to various factors, including higher rates of illiteracy, lack of education, and even denial by their male contemporaries). The “artistic” view of maternity which Vida expresses here is again a point of convergence between this fictional protagonist and her non-fictional creator, Montseny:

248 Allen suggests that the trend of motherhood being seen as the continuation of the individual (or also of the nation) is indicative of a gradual shift from child-centered to parent-, or mother-centered approaches to parenting which began in the 1920s and continues even into the present day. She refers to this cultural trend as “the redefinition of parenthood from a duty to a form of self-fulfillment,” emphasizing that the planning of reproduction focuses more on the welfare of the parents than on the child (240).

249 For example, see Miguel de Unamuno’s Del sentimiento trágico de la vida (1912) and the poetry of Juan Ramón Jiménez, particularly his poem “Mi sitio,” in the verses of which the poetic voice repeatedly declares “¡Yo quiero ser eterno!”.
A la maternidad habría de considerársela como una de las bellas artes. La madre ha de ser un artista, un poeta de la forma y del sentimiento. Y el hijo la culminación artística, la obra legada a la posteridad, concepto verdaderamente augusto de la madre, que la colocaría en un plano sublime. (Montseny, “La mujer, problema del hombre V” 108).

In pinpointing maternity as a mode of eternalizing the self to which women had exclusive access, Montseny attempts to identify a way in which women might exercise creative agency for the purpose of individual, self-fulfillment. Her various essays strive to negotiate the difficulties inherent in this project by theorizing love, and thus maternity, outside the confines of morality: “El amor, pues, no puede ser moral. Es decir, no puede ni debe encerrarse dentro de ningún canon, de ninguna norma, de ninguna costumbre, de ninguna ley” (105). Perhaps intended as a veritable caveat for reactionary objections to the anarchist tenets of “amor libre” (clearly evident in Montseny’s advocacy of individualizamiento), Spanish women would problematically encounter numerous challenges should they actually adhere to such a premise.

Rejecting norms, customs, and even the law might appear a radically necessary step towards instigating change within the pages of fiction, but in reality this idealism would fail most Spanish women in the twenties. They would likely be ostracized, alienated from family support-systems, fired from jobs in the later months of pregnancy, and ultimately transformed into second-class citizens in a conservative culture that scorned single mothers and illegitimate children. Far from embarking on a romanticized journey that might spur a social revolution, their real-life rejection of popular morality would only render them a struggling outcast, much like the unwed, pregnant Isabel learned in Burgos’s La rampa.
Montseny’s intent to skirt this issue by emphasizing the need for a profound, quasi-spiritual amorous connection between two individuals rather than mere sexual attraction distinguishes her idealized preference for breaking with tradition from that of Burgos’s didactic warning. Nevertheless, Montseny’s Vida lives her life nearly as solitarily as Burgos’s Isabel, thus further indicating the difficulties facing women like the former who actively question and challenge Spanish society’s expectations, as well as those like the latter who deliberately (or inadvertently) behave counter to these same expectations. From another perspective, however, we might interpret Montseny’s Vida to be a critique of those women like Burgos’s Isabel, who ultimately suffer due to both their own hasty decisions made without regards to a new moral imperative like individualizamiento, and to their subsequent inability to consciously contemplate maternity as voluntary, noble endeavor.

Returning to Montseny’s conception of maternity as an art form, we must again recall that her views of women’s difference are similar to the parameters established by essential motherhood. Yet “essential motherhood” lacks the element of choice, which was fundamental to Montseny’s version of the idealized maternal experience. In fact, her controversial statement about women-as-mothers is in actuality wholly dependent on the prerequisite of maternal choice: “Mujer sin hijos es árbol sin fruto, rosal sin rosas. La cuestión está en saber ser madre y serlo consciente y voluntariamente” (El problema 28, my emphasis). Rather than considering Montseny’s observation in isolation, it is more productive to juxtapose it with her fictional alter-ego, Vida’s (la indomable’s) consideration

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250 Again, I refer to DiQuinzio’s definition of “essential motherhood” as an “ideological formation that specifies the essential attributes of motherhood and articulates femininity in terms of motherhood so understood. According to essential motherhood, mothering is a function of women’s essentially female nature, women’s biological reproductive capacities, and/or human evolutionary development. Essential motherhood construes women’s motherhood as natural and inevitable. It requires women’s exclusive and selfless attention to and care of children based on women’s psychological and emotional capacities for empathy, awareness of the needs of others, and self-sacrifice” (xiii).
of motherhood. This self-respecting protagonist will not compromise her independence or her free will by entering into an institutionalized relationship, but rather she chooses to perpetually wait for the individual who might be worthy of her. This unrelenting spirit, however, complicates her desire for motherhood: “Lamentaré no encontrar hombre digno de mí porque ello me privará del placer de ser madre… Lamentaré no encontrar hombre digno de mí” (132-33). As a self-created, exemplar modern woman, Vida is not only a sentinel who marches ahead of her female contemporaries, but she has also preceded the ideal, modern man that Montseny envisioned: an individual capable of concurrently loving his female companion, whilst allowing her unlimited freedom. Despite professing her desire to become a mother, and despite her conviction that maternity in fact renders women superior to gods, Vida nevertheless maintains that love is necessary in order for this act of creation to be fruitful: “Para que una obra de carne sea perfecta, es necesario crear con amor. Hasta las frías producciones del espíritu, las obras de la mano humana, necesitan del amor si quieren alcanzar la categoría de geniales” (133). Montseny’s conviction that true love is only possible between two equals renders motherhood impossible for the “future-woman” imagined in her “untamable” protagonist – the rebellious hero who seeks liberty and freedom beyond that which her contemporary moment can offer.

On several occasions, Vida explains to other characters in the novel that her uncompromising spirit is perpetually misunderstood – especially by men. In order for her to live a truly free life, she must ultimately do so alone: “A las mujeres como yo no se las ama” (116; 134). As such, she views motherhood as desirable, yet unattainable. For Vida, a pregnancy occurring in the absence of both love and unlimited freedom for the woman within her relationship relegates her to a passive position; her active agency as creator – or artist – is
suppressed: “¡No quiero tener un hijo como una coneja tiene sus conejos! Con sólo el interés rudimentario y brutal de la reproducción de la especie” (132-33). Vida amplifies this metaphor and expresses horror at the idea that women may someday be able to have children through impersonal medical or technological procedures:

Un día leí, a un feminista, que quizá las mujeres, en tiempos futuros, valiéndose de la química, podrán prescindir de la colaboración del hombre para la maternidad. ¡Qué horror! Me espanta pensar en las criaturas monstruosas que aparecerían sobre la tierra, si semejante aberración fuese posible. ¿Crear sin amor, convertirse en incubadora voluntaria, matar en nosotros la ilusión y la sublimidad que el amor representa? Nunca, nunca.

(133)

These ideas illustrate that, despite the fact that Montseny promoted maternity as a women’s most noble endeavor, she nevertheless did not endorse this role if certain conditions were not, or could not, be met. That is, she did not believe that women should choose to have children merely because they are biologically capable of doing so.

In keeping with the concept of maternity as an artistic aesthetic, the idealistic Vida professes that, even if she should never become a mother, she may still find satisfaction in the fact that she would have maintained allegiance to her own self-defined principles: “Seré un artista irrealizado o fracasado. Mas nunca llegaré a ser, en ese respecto, un miserable copiador o caricaturizador de la naturaleza, un escultor o un poeta sin arranque y entraña humana” (133). With Vida’s qualification, an interpretation of Montseny’s statement regarding childless women (“Mujer sin hijos es árbol sin fruto, rosal sin rosas”) might take on another, more profound meaning. An alternative reading might suggest that maternity and
femininity are not mutually dependent (as essential motherhood dictates), but rather two distinct elements which might reciprocally enhance or enrich the experience of womanhood, rather than define it. We have seen how Vida does not compromise her standards in matters of education or professional work, but neither does she settle in her personal life for a companion who fails to live up to her lofty ideals: “tampoco soy mujer para contentarme con aproximaciones de ideal… Yo quiero el ideal entero… Quiero amar plenamente y ser plenamente amada, o no amar nunca. Quiero todo el amor… No un poco de amor ni un poco de ideal. Todo, todo entero, o si no, nada” (134). Should she – or any similar woman – remain childless, we might consider her a selective “artist,” unwilling to create a work of art when the most optimum of conditions cannot be met. Such conditions might include favorable economic circumstances, physical health and biological capacity, and even appropriate companionate relationships. Maternity as an artistic proposition, then, is praiseworthy in the sense that it both affirms a woman’s right to complete autonomy of her own body, as well as confers upon her an enormous degree of creative agency. Paradoxically, however, the independence and self-reliance necessary to pragmatically approach maternity as an aesthetic principle is in reality complicated by a lofty idealism that is blind to the complex social and cultural forces preventing women in Spain from obtaining this very sense of autonomy.

The idealism and naiveté of this young protagonist (and her creator!) at once propels and frustrates the novel’s progress. Due to the fact that La indomable ends when Vida is only twenty-three years of age (and we must recall that Montseny wrote the narrative when she herself was only 21), readers can only speculate as to what the future may bring. They may surmise that Vida will continue to reject the traditional, socially acceptable female roles. In
the text, Vida is chronically dissatisfied with the fact that contemporary society typecasts women in a restrictive, dichotomous manner: the traditional domestic role, or the modern rebellious women. Carlos, her close friend from childhood, understands the lack of options available to Spanish women, and he summarizes her options as two unique paths (“caminos”). Should she elect the first, she may be intelligent and continue to write what Carlos refers to as “bonitas cosas” (85). Yet he insists that she must not forget her gender or lose sight of social conventions: “…casarte, tener hijos, asegurar la vejez de tus padres y ser feliz sin excesos” (85). Vida rejects this path, characteristic of the traditional ángel del hogar. She awaits the second option:

El otro es el camino que seguirás si te colocas resueltamente fuera de los senderos trillados a la mujer española. Si dejas desarrollar tu talento en todos sus aspectos… Si no te preocupas por conservar tu buena compostura de mujer decente, al estilo español… gustándote este calificativo de indomable. Si te formas una personalidad y una vida, y estás dispuesta a emanciparte del sexo y obrar como un ser humano o… sobre-humano. Si sigues este camino, serás irremediablemente desgraciada; no habrá hombre que se atreva contigo… (85)

These choices in fact revolve around motherhood and, as such they epitomize the “maternal dilemma” which many early twentieth-century women encountered. More specifically, for this protagonist they represent a false dilemma; Vida refuses to believe the veracity of Carlos’s assertion that these are the only two viable, or acceptable, routes she may take. She opts instead for a “camino libre” (86). Vida, like her author Montseny, believed women should be absolutely free to choose their destinies, both professionally and personally, in a
modernizing society that would soon be able to afford them this new “right.” This is indeed a lofty benchmark, and rather than give explicit advice on how to achieve it, Montseny concentrates instead on promoting an active awareness of her culture’s potential for immediate, albeit incremental transformation, one individual at a time.

As a final example of Vida’s individualist, anarcho-feminist personality and her complex notion of personal freedom, it is important to note her interactions with Bernardo. At first glance, Bernardo appears to offer Vida (and the reader) a promising potential companion for the protagonist. He is from a working class family yet remained intent on educating himself as a result of what the narrator refers to as his individualist spirit ("una epopeya de esfuerzo individual" (100-01). From his education, he has become passionate about the libertarian ideas driving the revolutionary atmosphere and activism in Barcelona and the surrounding Catalonian region. But even this purportedly ideal male companion, exhibiting individualist traits crucial to both the anarchist agenda and to Montseny’s vision of equality, cannot completely accept Vida’s personality. He explains to her: “[E]res una individualista por temperamento… Tu teoría de la personalidad y de la voluntad de ti misma se origina en la propia esencia de tu personalidad y de tu carácter. Eres un temperamento posesivo de sí mismo, un mundo individual en el acervo común de los mundos humanos” (106). Bernardo’s evaluation of Vida concurs with Carlos’s observation, and again we see clear allusions to the Nietzschean superman, Zarathustra. In fact, it seems that Bernardo feels threatened by Vida’s superior ability to carry out her ideas, rather than merely theorize them: “Preferiría verte en más modesta posición sobre la tierra. Preferiría que no te fueses tan rápidamente hacia las cumbres y te quedaras a media montaña, con nosotros” (108). Vida, however, refuses once again to compromise, she rejects Bernardo’s advances, and insists on
maintaining allegiance to her own individual convictions: “Las pienso yo: no me importa que el mundo no las piense; las amo yo: no me importa que el mundo no las ame; las vivo yo: no me importa que el mundo no las viva” (108). Even more, she voices her refusal in a way that criticizes both contemporary aesthetic movements (arte nuevo and poesía pura) as well as traditional philosophical discourse (rooted in mind-body dualism) for their lack of vitality and practical implementation: “La idea por la idea es como el arte por el arte: juego inútil de colores, de sonidos o de palabras. La idea por la idea es aún un resto de la fría metafísica, que nada tuvo de común con la vida humana” (109). For this protagonist, any sort of revolutionary manifesto (whether it be anarchism, feminism, or even, perhaps, the avant-garde ismos) is useless if it remains a mere abstraction. Vida’s steadfast individualism is predicated on her desire to actively carry out her philosophy; or at the very least, to actively seek out and create those conditions which would promote its flourishing. Though we do not observe her actions in the twenty-three short years of her life that Montseny highlights, the open-ended structure of the novel fits with Montseny’s belief that a radically altered future is at once imminent yet uncertain.

Despite the fact that Vida is a veritable prototype of our author’s “mujer nueva,” practicing the liberated lifestyle advocated by the author’s own principles of individualizamiento, she is nevertheless branded throughout the novel with a variety of

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251 Vida expands on the interdependence of her theoretical ideas and the life she chooses to live: “Es la idea por la vida, la vida por la idea, lo que debemos considerar digno de nosotros. La vida vinculada a nosotros mismos, confundida con nosotros mismos…” (109). This philosophy counters some of the respected philosophical and artistic discourses of the 1920s. Ortega y Gasset’s renowned Deshumanización del arte (1924), for example, declared that contemporary art was purified of all human elements, or “dehumanized” such that it might be considered nothing more than a piece of artwork for its own sake. In Ortega’s rather elitist philosophy, the existence of realist, human elements represented art of the masses, and thus not truly “art” at all. Moreover, the spur of avant-garde activity in Spain – from futurism, to cubism, to surrealism – was built upon a desire to break with the past and create art from a veritable tabula rasa.

252 Roberta Johnson has contrasted the active qualities of Montseny’s Vida with the more passive, introspective attitudes of the characters invented by Unamuno, Azorín, Baroja, and other male writers at this time: “The male characters are paralyzed, rather than motivated to action, by their ideas” (Gender and Nation 253).
adjectives that render her a female outcast, a misfit, or a deviant within the present Spanish society of the 1920s. In the end, however, it becomes clear that these descriptors are employed not as a means to negatively characterize Vida, but rather to underscore her capacity to both challenge and transform the present social order. As Montseny explains, “El problema, para los superficiales, los domesticados y los simples, no existe… El problema sólo se plantea para los inquietos y los inadaptados, para los que viven, en una palabra” (El problema 14). The implication that it is precisely those “inquietos” and “inadaptados” who are capable of truly living (vivir) in a sense that challenges the status quo is reminiscent of Carmen de Burgos’s Quiero vivir mi vida. In fact, Montseny employs the precise phrase “vivir su vida” at various moments throughout her novels and essays in a way that equates this lifestyle with ultimate independence, liberation, and equality. Throughout the final pages of La indomable, Vida insists to Carlos that she will “vivir su vida”: “Soy solo un ser que se obstina en vivir… Vivir quiere decir tener imperativos, necesidades supremas de vida, que hagan la nuestra precisa, que la hagan útil y le den un valor en el tiempo y en sí misma” (174). Similarly, Montseny states that the ideal modern woman “puede, quiere y debe vivir su vida” (El problema 29). Yet Montseny and her contemporaries (Burgos and Nelken) nevertheless portray purportedly liberated female protagonists that are characterized by a profound lack of adaptation and ability to integrate to their surroundings. Rather than feminine defects or character flaws, this fact signals the extent to which Spanish society remains hostile towards women who step outside the traditional paradigm of conservative womanhood rooted in the submissive, passive, and fundamentally maternal ángel del hogar.

253 The mere act of freely “living” one’s life according to an individual imperative is a core component of Montseny’s anarcho-feminism, and the this phrase curiously appears in the work of Carmen de Burgos, Margarita Nelken, and the anarchist Emma Goldman (whom Montseny greatly admired). Burgos titles her final novel Quiero vivir mi vida; Nelken includes the phrase “vivir su vida” in her novel En torno a nosotras; and Emma Goldman’s autobiography is entitled, simply, Living My Life.
Unlike Burgos’s novel, *Quiero vivir mi vida*, in which the protagonist cannot overcome her own maternal dilemma as a result of the oppressive limitations and expectations placed on her as a woman in Spanish society, Montseny’s *La indomable* concludes without a definitive ending. This suggests that several possibilities still exist for an individual like Vida to resolve the conflict between her anarcho-feminist individualism and her desire for motherhood. Given that the artistic ideal informing Montseny’s view of maternity is significantly embedded within the individual, and thus removed from a more generalized concept of social action, the ability to enact noticeable change is difficult at the point in time depicted in the novel. In fact, one of the main weaknesses of her proposition is that its future-oriented goals romanticize potential outcomes and overlook, or even trivialize the limitations of the present moment. Considering the sheer quantity of critical articles in which Montseny strives to work through her ideas regarding women’s emancipation, it is certainly true that she understood the temporal chasm between her reality and her ideal. In 1924 she even went as far as to describe women’s emancipation as a tragedy, in its current context: “[P]agan con la soledad su emancipación” (Montsey, “La tragedia” 20). But the strength of *La indomable* lies in the fact that it neither ends tragically nor unrealistically. That is, the narrative both identifies the quixotic behavior required of the new woman of the future while acknowledging the genuine obstacles which surround her, all without converting her into a tragic, failed protagonist.\footnote{Johnson shares my viewpoint, noting that the ambiguous ending of *La indomable* indicates that “Vida’s life can have no conclusion in the present age,” but she is determined not to drown in these limitations (Gender and Nation 254). Johnson also identifies a parallel between Montseny’s use of the verb “ahogarse” in the novel and Nelken’s sandtrap metaphor in *La trampa del arenal* (254-55).} Furthermore, Montseny leaves the young heroine (and her readers) with a relatively optimistic outlook regarding the many years, and still unknowable opportunities and developments, which may await Vida in her future. Importantly, Vida’s
closest friend, Carlos, gives voice to the novel’s final metafictional lines as he observes: “Es lástima. No podrá ver el fin de este curioso e inverosímil drama. Si con mi fortuna pudiera comprarne un asiento fijo y eterno en el teatro del mundo, sólo por este desenlace lo adquiriría gustoso” (176). While this particular novel does not offer closure for Vida, the indomitable “mujer sobre-humana,” Montseny’s shorter novelas will explore numerous possible outcomes in which women employ individualizamiento and actively practice the “art” of maternity in order to assuage, if not entirely resolve, their maternal dilemmas.

Exploring the Paradoxical Politics of Mothering in “Maternidad” (1925) and “El derecho al hijo” (1927)

“Y así apareció La Novela Ideal, que, según el franquismo, envenenó a tres generaciones de españolas” (Montseny, Mis primeros 41). With pride, Federica Montseny recalls in her autobiography the impact of this popular bi-weekly series of fictional narratives, or novelas, that her family’s anarchist journal, La Revista Blanca, published in Spain from 1923 to 1936. This poignant quotation has been referenced by several critics who have begun to engage with Montseny’s literary production over the past decade. Nevertheless, these scholars continue to turn their analyses towards Montseny’s longer works of fiction, like La Victoria, El hijo de Clara, and La indomable, or even her autobiography.255 This shift in critical attention is most likely due to the fact that Montseny only wrote three extensive novels – each of which were quite popular in their own cultural milieu – whereas

255 See Roberta Johnson’s Gender and Nation, as well as articles by Ana Lozano de la Pola and Nuria Cruz-Cámara for scholarly work on Montseny’s novels. For an extensive analysis of Montseny’s autobiography, Mis primeros cuarenta años, see Patricia V. Greene’s articles (“Federica Montseny: Chronicler of an Anarchofeminist Genealogy” and “Memoria y militancia: Federica Montseny”), as well as Shirley Mangini’s Memories of Resistance, a study on memory and autobiographical narratives composed by various Spanish women in exile.
she composed an astounding 600 articles for anarchist journals like *La Revista Blanca* and *El Luchador*, “periódico de Sátira, Crítica, Doctrina y Combate” (Nash, “Dos intelectuales” 74). Furthermore, Montseny penned over 50 short *novelas* for the two main series of fiction that *La Revista Blanca*’s editorial published: the aforementioned *La Novela Ideal* (1925-38) and the subsequent *La Novela Libre* (1929-38). These short novels were much more than mere frivolous *folletín*-esque narratives written purely for entertainment purposes. Quite the contrary, Montseny suggests that they were in fact strategically composed ideological vehicles which were directed at a very specific readership: Spanish youth, and in particular, young women (Núñez Esteban and Samblancat Miranda 182). The themes were neither traditional nor uncompromised, and Montseny herself has succinctly summarized the revolutionary thought processes which guided each publication: “En *La Novela Ideal* se abordaban, en forma novelesca, temas antirreligiosos, de propaganda libertaria, a favor del amor libre y contra los prejuicios sociales” (Montseny, *Mis primeros* 42). I argue that these short novelas, with decidedly avant-garde, even iconoclastic theses, provided Montseny with an ample site upon which to theorize the paradoxes that result from her privileging certain aspects of “essential motherhood” within the anarcho-feminist, individualist framework that formed the basis of her intellectual and philosophical thought. Through the creation of brief, often implausible plot sketches like those found in “Maternidad” (1925) and “El derecho al hijo” (1928), Montseny formulates hypothetical circumstances which aim to accommodate the diversity and specificities of women in relation to their potential maternal roles (rather than merely make women synonymous with mothers).

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256 *El Luchador* was also published in Barcelona by Montseny’s father, Federico Urales, from 1931-33 (Nash, “Dos intelectuales” 74).
Both “Maternidad” and “El derecho del hijo” engage in what DiQuinzio refers to as the “paradoxical politics of mothering” – that is, these narratives actively embrace the paradoxes that result when feminist theories of motherhood inevitably encounter the dilemma of difference (as we have seen with Vida in La indomable) (xviii). “Maternidad” questions what exactly it means to be a mother, and ultimately suggests that institutions are to blame for obstructing, denigrating, or otherwise limiting a woman’s maternal potential. In “El derecho al hijo” the protagonist, Rosa María, unambiguously argues that single motherhood should indeed be a plausible, valid choice for young Spanish women exercising their own free will. Clearly, to propose single motherhood within Spain at this time was revolutionary, but to put it into practice was another polemic entirely. With a complete lack of state aid or public support systems, and the perennial failures of charitable institutions like the Casa de Maternidad and the Inclusa (each of which Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny criticized, either directly or implicitly), both public discourse and socio-political policies still rendered single motherhood an implausibility, impracticality, and ultimately an immorality. Importantly, in each of these novelas, Montseny creates highly stylized circumstances which attempt to bridge this chasm between the reality of her current moment and the ideality of her proposed future. She imagines a utopic atmosphere in which the social realities many Spanish women endured (which prevented them from earning a living wage, owning property, and voting on legal policies) are ameliorated such that their individual right to personal autonomy – even in relation to their maternity – may be prioritized. The realist impulses behind these novelas’ diverse cast of characters permit Montseny to circumvent the pitfalls of “essential motherhood,” which has the potential to exclude or homogenize women and mothers. Additionally, the short, folletín-esque style of this narrative genre allows Montseny to
imagine her protagonists amidst fortuitous circumstances, thus she can also avoid presenting the tales as explicit “recommendations” which Spanish women might replicate.

Consequently, I assert that the novelas function as a means to promote critical contemplation of maternal possibilities, rather than to disseminate explicitly didactic “instructions” or advice for women to emulate.

As a way of contextualizing these novelas, it is necessary to first understand the agenda, readership, and significance of the journal in which they appeared: Barcelona’s La Revista Blanca. It was La Revista Blanca’s La Novela Ideal series in which these short stories were published, and this popular series of novelas was printed incessantly between 1925 and 1938.257 This collection was published with no interruptions, and only came to an end with the onset of the Spanish Civil War. Serrano suggests that this lengthy, thirteen-year run places the series “muy por encima de la casi totalidad de las demás colecciones de relatos breves publicadas en otros ambientes” (220). This is noteworthy, given the plethora of literary journals and revistas which appeared in Spanish cities, particularly Madrid, during the early decades of the twentieth century.258 La Revista Blanca’s second fictional series, La Novela Libre, enjoyed similar popularity, though its publication run lasted only about nine years (1929-1938). Montseny has emphasized the dramatic reach and reputation of these series – especially La Novela Ideal. She notes the way in which the fame of these novelistic tales essentially ensured the continual survival of the more philosophical, sociological, and political essays which appeared in the parent journal, La Revista Blanca:

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257 Andrew H. Lee believes that the final issue of La Revista Blanca was issue number 591, published in 1938. Nearly every issue of La Novela Ideal series can be found in Amsterdam at the International Institute of Social History.

258 Mainier lists the series La Novela Corta (1916-25), La Novela Semanal (1921-25), La Novela de Hoy (1922-32), and La Novela Mundial (1926-26) as being among the most popular folletines appearing in Madrid during the 1920s, thus relative contemporaries of the anarchist La Revista Blanca (73-74). Clearly, as the dates make clear, these magazines did not enjoy the longevity of La Novela Ideal.
Para que se pueda tener una idea del volumen que habían adquirido las ediciones de *La Revista Blanca*, señalaré que de *La Novela Ideal* llegaron a editarse, semanalmente, 50.000 ejemplares y unos 20.000 de *La Novela Libre*. Fueron los beneficios que nos dejaban estas publicaciones, de carácter popular, lo que nos permitió sostener *La Revista Blanca*, que nunca llegó a sobrepasar los 6.000 ejemplares. (*Mis primeros 56*)

Beyond the sheer quantity of publications, Serrano points out that the true indication of the journal’s success is the fact that it began in 1923 as a biweekly publication, yet by 1927 the rate of print and publication had accelerated to three times each month (225). Even this accelerated pace of publication, however, could not meet the great public demand.  

Greene even attributes the quick appearance of *La Novela Libre* only a few years after *La Novela Ideal* to the massive popularity of this form of novelistic propaganda (“Federica” 127).  

Regardless of the motives, the rapid rate of publication has led many critics and historians to dismiss *La Novela Ideal* as frivolous, even anti-literary propaganda (Lozano de la Pola 399-400).  

These dismissals tend to overlook the series’ ultimate goals, as well as the particular readership to which it was directed.

As a frequent author of the novelas, not to mention the principal editor of the series, Montseny clarifies the intentions which impelled the dissemination of these short stories:

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259 According to Serrano: “Pero la señal más inequívoca del éxito general de la empresa fue la progresión del ritmo mismo de su publicación. Habíase iniciado como colección quincenal, saliendo a la venta los días 8 y 23 de cada mes; pero el n 60, de mediados de 1927, anunció ya: ‘A partir del próximo número LA NOVELA IDEAL se publicará los días 10, 20 y 30 de cada mes…’. Este nuevo ritmo siguió siendo inferior a la demanda” (225).

260 Greene also points out that between the two series, *La Novela Ideal* and *La Novela Libre*, *La Revista Blanca* published over 800 novelas between 1925 and 1938 (“Federica” 127).

261 Prado also notes that these novelas are perceived as mere “novelas rosas,” and exhibit excessive exaggeration and melodrama, yet they provide important insight into the situation of women as historical and political subjects” (17).
Queríamos que las novelas tuvieran un fondo ético elevado y a la vez una forma correcta, pero si había que dar alguna preferencia, se la dábamos a la ética por encima de la estética [sic]. El resultado era que la vertiente educadora del público se convertía en la finalidad primera de la novela. Nosotros éramos conscientes de que la juventud leía con más facilidad, leía mejor, una novela que libros de filosofía o de ciencia, más abstractos y difíciles de asimilar. Por este motivo nos planteamos la necesidad de crear un tipo de novela ligera, de apariencia inocente, donde se exponían las ideas que queríamos inculcar en la juventud. Y creo que lo conseguimos. (qtd. in Núñez Esteban and Samblancat Miranda 182)

Clearly, the anarchists viewed these novelas as didactic tools, capable of influencing both the philosophical outlook and socio-political activism of the young generation. Furthermore, their aim at educating young women in particular is inarguably feminist, from a contemporary standpoint, especially given that the didactic goals revolved around challenging the restrictive and traditional social, legal, and institutional forces which worked against women. As we have seen with Carmen de Burgos and the burgeoning feminist movement of the early twentieth century, education was in fact one of the primary goals of women’s emancipation, generally prioritized over political rights like suffrage. Montseny and her anarcho-feminist contemporaries, however, criticized the fact that the majority of education in Spain was informed by the conventions of church and state (both patriarchal institutions). Even worse, according to Montseny, was the fact that so many women who were confined to the domestic sphere of the home were also entrusted with educating their children – the future generation of the Spanish nation. She observed that these women
remained uncritically obedient to the same religiosity and conservatism that informed the most powerful institutions. Anarcho-feminist literature aimed to educate by circumventing these social and political institutions and defying, even undermining, their values. As a result, they presented a rather one-sided, liberal perspective. In comparison to the novels of Burgos and Nelken, in which both protagonists and secondary characters alike often debate the merits of conservative and liberal approaches to an array of social or even political topics, these novelas aim to promote a very specific worldview. Central to this vision is the portrayal of young, educated, and self-assured protagonists who clash with the conservative, rather ignorant mindset of an elder generation that clings unquestioningly to tradition. The political and ideological underpinnings informing the educational project of these anarchist publications must not be overlooked, as they produce a more militant and radical tone within these novelas than that which characterizes the social realist narratives penned by Burgos and Nelken.

It is worth citing one final, extensive quote from Montseny as a way of better understanding the themes which graced the pages of this journal, and in particular how these issues were meant to awaken a more active female consciousness to the gendered dynamics of legal and social policies:

Escogíamos los temas en función del público, con la pretensión de influir sobre este público para conducirlo insensiblemente hacia la aceptación de ideas avanzadas, como era por ejemplo el tema del amor libre, donde aparecían las relaciones entre hombre y mujer marcadas por la libertad sexual. No eran, sin embargo, novelas eróticas, sino novelas que proponían una nueva concepción del amor basada en la libertad, en la espontaneidad […]
En general, lo que queríamos reflejar era la lucha del hombre y de la mujer aprisionados por las fuerzas de la reacción, de las instituciones, de la Iglesia, sobre todo. Eran novelas anti-religiosas, anti-Iglesia, dirigidas principalmente a las mujeres que eran las más influidas por la Iglesia. Pretendíamos crear una novela libre e independiente, al margen de cualquier atadura reaccionaria (qtd. in Núñez Esteban and Samblancat Miranda 182, my emphasis).

We see here how Montseny simultaneously emphasizes that the novelas specifically catered to and targeted women, yet attempts to mitigate this possibly “feminist” agenda through her libertarian philosophy which presents both men and women as victims (“aprisionados”) within a restrictive social order. While her personal, subjective reflections as an author are essential, we must also compare them to the way in which La Novela Ideal actually presented these stories in its own cultural milieu. Patricia Greene has brought to light the announcement made in the issue of La Revista Blanca immediately preceding the publication of the first issue of La Novela Ideal (“Federica” 127-28). In this promotional paragraph, La Revista Blanca explicitly spells out the goals of La Novela Ideal series: “Queremos novelas que exponen, bella y claramente, episodios de las vidas empanadas en la lucha en pro de una sociedad libertaria… ideas y sentimientos, mezclados con actos heroicos que eleven el espíritu y fortalezcan la acción… novelas optimistas que llenen de esperanza el alma” (qtd. in Greene, “Federica” 128). The lack of gender-specific details in this objective description of the novelas, compared to Montseny’s personal observations that women were truly the targeted audience, further supports the notion that our author did indeed exhibit a decidedly feminist mindset.
Finally, we must recall that these were anarchist publications, and their appearance spanned the years of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship in which censorship was prominent. Notably, each of the two issues which I will discuss, “Maternidad,” and “El derecho del hijo,” boast stamps of approval from the censors on their front covers which read: “Revisado por la previa censura.”262 This tangible indication of the censors’ approval may initially appear perplexing, given the quite revolutionary, modern interpretations of womanhood and sexual relations which Montseny explores in these tales, combined with her aforementioned description of the novelas’ themes. Yet unlike the moral and religious censoring associated with the Franco dictatorship, Montseny explains that the seven-year Primo de Rivera regime established entirely different parameters for censorship that focused more on material attacking domestic politics and less on social critique.263 As such, La Revista Blanca’s series of Novelas were able to survive, even flourish under this “status quo,” while some of the more politically-oriented essays found trouble with the censors. Montseny also suggests that the title of the journal worked in their favor, as the censors surely would have been on higher alert, or even prohibited the entire contents were the journal to have been entitled “La Revista Roja” (40).264 Tavera similarly notes that La Revista Blanca’s subtitle, “Sociología, Ciencia y

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262 Serrano notes that this stamp of “approval” only applied to certain issues of the series, and that the censuring practices of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship “no parece haberles ocasionado más trastorno que el de incluir cada relato de La Novela Ideal, desde el número 24 hasta el 218, la mención: ‘revisado por la previa censura’” (231). Robert Kern, however, implies that for La Revista Blanca, the censorship of the dictatorship meant that “the publication of each issue was a battle” (Red Years 74). He documents occasions in which the Civil Guard raided print shops and copies of the journal “disappeared” or were seized by authorities, yet he also recognizes that there must have been “some agreement with government officials,” since no material was ever printed on domestic politics (74).

263 Montseny explains: “No había que atacar al rey, ni al Ejército, ni a la Iglesia. No se debían publicar caricaturas alusivas al rey, a la familia real y al general Primo de Rivera. Peor no había ninguna supresión apriorística de propagandas ideológicas, siempre y cuando no pusiesen en peligro los estamentos del sistema” (Montseny, Mis primeros 41).

264 Montseny details the way in which she and the editors cautiously weighed the issue of censorship: “A nosotros se nos planteó el dilema de intentar proseguir la publicación de la revista… sometiéndonos a la censura, o suprimirla. Decidimos esperar los acontecimientos. Si la suspendían, no habría más remedio que desaparecer. Si no la suspendían, intentaríamos capear el temporal e ir publicando textos libertarios, aunque
Arte,” offered further protection (Federica 67). Additionally, Montseny confesses in her autobiography that her father had friends who were responsible for censoring the novelas, and on several occasions these connections worked in the journal’s favor. Regardless of the forces working for or against the anarchists at this time, the ultimate result was that the novelas enjoyed a lengthy and prolific dissemination to a broad, impressionable young readership.

Turning our attention now to these novelas, the plots present themes of great concern not only to Montseny personally, but to the individualist, anarcho-feminist philosophy which informed much of La Revista Blanca’s publications on women’s issues. In particular, one of the principal aspects of the anarcho-feminist project of liberating women was the corresponding liberation of maternity, or “la liberación maternal,” as Prado terms it (230). He notes that the individualist anarchism touted by both men and women in La Revista Blanca promoted maternity as “esencialmente ligada a la identidad de la mujer” (230). As such, one of the journal’s key goals concerned the condemnation of those social systems that prevented women from developing their supposedly innate maternal faculties. Montseny, for example, believed that the institution of marriage within her contemporary society was a primary contributor to “the suppression of female individualism” (Fredericks, “Federica” 5). In both “Maternidad” and “El derecho del hijo,” the problems and failures of the institution of

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265 In her memoirs, Montseny gives the most illuminating, even amusing account of the way in which the journal was often able to eschew the scrutiny of the censors, yet appear to nonetheless “suffer” censorship from a supposedly powerful and controlling dictatorial eye whose mission was to quell governmental resistance like that touted by anarchists. Montseny recalls her father’s relationship with “el capitán Porras,” a government official who had and extremely large family, and often benefitted from Urales providing him with a few extra rabbits or produce from their farm, or even a small monetary reward. According to Montseny, then, “La relación de Porras llegó a tal grado de confianza, que incluso algunas veces tuvimos el sello de la censura en nuestras manos, censurando, para hacer quedar bien a Porras, ciertos texto puestos adrede para ello. Parece increíble, pero cierto” (Mis primeros 40).
marriage provide a supportive backdrop for the presentation of alternative familial structures. In these *novelas*, our anarcho-feminist author creates highly theatricalized representations of female protagonists who aim to affirm maternity as both their distinct individual right and as the maximum expression of their inherently feminist individualism.

**Multilateral Motherhood in “Maternidad” (1925)**

In the Spain of the 1920s, women faced numerous social and institutional challenges – even explicit barriers – which prevented them from incorporating maternity fully into their expression of individual subjectivity. For example, children born out of wedlock were stigmatized as illegitimate, and a total lack of social support systems caused women to perceive their individual desires for education, self-improvement, or a career to be incompatible with motherhood. In “Maternidad,” Federica Montseny places women’s maternity at the center of an individualist philosophy that is both theorized and problematized. The *novela* ultimately deconstructs the central tenet of “essential motherhood” which homogenizes the maternal experience – and women – by dictating that all women are naturally destined to become mothers (DiQuinzio xiii-xv). In the process, the narrative implicitly criticizes traditional societal values and social institutions, each of which perpetuates a culture that impedes the possibility of voluntarily and conscientiously choosing motherhood. Appearing in 1925 during the early years of *La Novela Ideal*, “Maternidad” portrays these challenges by way of a dichotomous representation of “dos maternidades,” each of which must confront, negotiate, and overpower some form of social or institutional
control. The narrative style exhibits a melodramatic tone and fortuitous unfolding events, both typical of the majority of La Novela Ideal’s short stories.²⁶⁶

The plot revolves around the life of Inesita (who was originally named Valentina Inés by her adoptive mother, Valentina, but promptly renamed Inés after her birth mother recovered her). Inesita’s life, however, has been anything but typical. Unbeknownst to this young woman, she was born in Madrid’s charitable maternity ward to her young, unwed mother (also named Inés), who was forced to hide her pregnancy to prevent a scandal in her small (fictional) village of Guadalviejos. Inés had intended to give up her child to the attached orphanage, the Inclusa. The midwife, however, decided not to deliver the newborn to the orphanage, but rather to give the infant girl to Valentina, a single woman in Madrid. Valentina had always desired a child, though she herself could not have one (“…la vida que le negaba el goce del amor y de la maternidad”) (5). Within a few short weeks, however, the authorities intervened, demanding that Inesita be returned to her “madre natural.” With shame, Inés and her infant daughter return to the village. Inés remarries several years later and has two more children with her new husband, thus she is able to legitimize her social status. Inesita, however, suffers a lack of affection and maternal love, as her mother (and step-father) clearly prefer their “legitimate” children. She finds solace with her childhood friend, Manuel, however he mother soon intervenes and prevents this relationship from becoming serious. Years later in Madrid, eighteen year-old Inesita fortuitously learns of her past, reconnects with Manuel, and feels compelled to take control of her individual circumstances – and her future – by confronting the two women who mothered her.

²⁶⁶ Susanna Tavera refers to the novels of La Novela Ideal as “poco realistas” and “inverosimiles” (Federica 70). She suggests this is due to the educational goal behind the tales, which she believes could best be conveyed through archetypes as opposed to more realistic, profound characters: “Los personajes de sus novelas y la trama entrelazada alrededor de ellos eran sin duda tan arquetípicos que su rendimiento respondía más a la pedagogía de la ficción que al reflejo de una realidad” (70).
The maternal dichotomy established in this *novela*, and to which I previously alluded, is best characterized by the repeated phrases, “la madre natural” and “la madre legítima y digna.” Similarly, one melodramatic line of the text summarizes these two types of maternity: “¡Cuán distintas las maternidades de las dos mujeres, la fecunda con vergüenza y la estéril con dolor!” (6). Immediately, readers are asked to contemplate both the corporal basis for the possibility of maternal expression, fertility or sterility, as well as what may be considered the specifically social, perhaps psychological implications of the subsequent maternal state: embarrassment or suffering (in this case, loneliness). Clearly, neither of these two poles suggests an idyllic maternal experience, and “Maternidad” explores the customary social and institutional practices which impeded woman’s voluntary affirmation of maternity as a positive element of their own female difference. The first mother, or “la madre natural y fecunda,” Inés, is compelled to view her unwed pregnancy with shame, and she suffers a temporary exile from the village in order to prevent a scandal. The narrator laments this injustice: “¡Oh, el sufrimiento y la vergüenza de aquella maternidad ocultada como un crimen…! (6). Despite efforts to hide her maternity, Inés is forced to return to her conservative village with an “illegitimate” child as a result of the botched, benevolent intentions of the *comadrona* who attempted to find a home for Inesita. Inés is panicked and distressed, dreading the judgment which awaits her. The narrator further reveals the difficulties which she will face as a single mother, having lost both her employment and her honorable reputation: “¡Pero su empleo, su empleo comprometido, su nombre arrastrado por el lodo; el terrible desprecio de la población mezquina y provinciana, que encontraría en ella ancho campo en donde saciar sus instintos perversos y su lengua viperina…!” (6). The narrative directs a clear critique at the restrictive traditional moral code of rural
Guadalvidejos which contributes to the suppression of maternal instincts by viewing unwed mothers as sinners and shunning them as if they were criminals.\(^{267}\)

The second, adoptive mother in the tale is Valentina. Referred to as “la madre digna,” she, on the contrary, embraced her “maternidad inesperada, dolorosa y rápida” (5). The narrator makes several references to sterility in the descriptions of Valentina, thus implying a physical inability to bear children. But despite the fact that she may be biologically unable to give birth to children, the narrator also reminds readers that this woman’s maternal instincts, or “su ternura de madre en espíritu, de madre en amor, de madre en passion y en ensueño,” flourish nonetheless (4). For Valentina, this unexpected child became a blessing, not a burden. As an adoptive mother, she gave the child (Inesita) her own name, Valentina Inés. Later, she continued to visit the girl in Guadalviejos until her birth mother (Inés) remarried, then severed contact with Valentina by relocating to Orense. Years later, Inesita finds Valentina in Madrid, and the older woman recounts: “Logré hacerme la ilusión de que eras mía. ¡Cuánto deseé tener hijos!... ¡Una hija, mi hija, mi ilusión, consuelo de mi soltería, luz de mi soledad, esperanza de mi mañana!” (23). Unfortunately, these fortuitous circumstances which led her to become an adoptive mother were quickly reversed when the judge ruled that the child must be returned to her birth mother, given that there had been no legal basis for the adoption other than “una ligereza de la comadrona, que entregó la niña a Valentina en vez de llevarla a la Inclusa” (4). As the narrator describes Valentina’s dismay upon losing her child, the language exhibits an accusatory tone, clearly implying that an injustice had been done against this adoptive mother: “la vida naciente fue arrancada de sus brazos;” “Valentina... deshizo en lágrimas el nudo de pena y rabia que en ella ponía la injusticia y el despojo de que

\(^{267}\) For example, when Inés and her daughter return to town, they arrive at dark, “procurando hacerse invisibles, huyendo de las miradas inquisidoras, de las sonrisitas implacable, del desprecio ambiente de un núcleo humano escandalizado porque había sido madre, primero, y porque no había querido serlo, después” (7).
fue víctima;” “Le habían robado su hija, la hija de su alma” (4). Without a doubt, these initial pages of the narrative establish a favorable portrait of Valentina as an adoptive mother suffering the loss of her newfound maternity, whilst inimically rendering Inés a disinterested birth mother who experiences her maternity as a shameful embarrassment, and ultimately a nuisance.

Upon establishing these dual forms of maternity, however, the novela advances in such a way that these maternal roles not only serve as a means of characterizing the two women, but also as a curious dichotomy upon which Montseny may theorize both traditional, and non-traditional, forms of mothering. The narrator presents readers with a complicated question: “¿Cuál era la madre verdadera, la madre-madre, la madre digna de ser así llamada? ¿La carnal o la moral; la que la trajo al mundo con dolor y vergüenza [Inés], o la que la acogió con goce infinito [Valentina]?” (8). Here, the corporal basis for maternity is placed in opposition to the inmaterial, instinctual maternal sentiment. The narrator elaborates the respective psychological impact of each variety of maternity: “Lo que era dicha en la una, en la otra era infortunio. Lo que en la una era esperanza perdida, ilusión rota, mañana desecho al arrancarla de sus brazos una ley que nunca como entonces demostró ser absurda, en la otra era esperanza perdida, ilusión rota, mañana desecho, al reintegrarla a ellos” (8). Significantly, these women’s maternal ventures are not defined merely by their own individual, internally subjective experiences, but rather by powerful, external cultural forces. The implication that one mother is worthy (“digna”) of enacting the maternal role while the other is not, further complicates any generalization that might render Montseny guilty of essentialism. Her separation of maternity into multiple categories – “carnal” (a woman who physically give birth to a child) and “moral” (a woman who cares for a child with joy and love) – clearly
indicates that she considers motherhood to be an extremely protean role, accessible and practicable by women of all social statuses, classes, and even ages.

In the case of the birth mother Inés, Montseny’s *novela* reveals to readers the way in which her maternal experience has in fact been molded by the moral values of her middle class upbringing. Here, this moral code, based on religious doctrine and social reputation, is the object of a harsh critique: “La sociedad ahogaba al instinto y al sentimiento: la clase media, tan mísera en lo moral y en lo económico, mediatizaba toda idea y sensación. La carrera era antes que la maternidad, la coacción religiosa y social, la vergüenza hipócrita, no del desliz, ni del engaño, ni del abandono, sino del descubrimiento de todo” (6-7). Montseny would similarly chastise these oppressive practices in her essay, *El problema de los sexos*. She notes that many Spanish women like Inés are not encouraged to act as free individuals, but rather to embark on a self-sacrificing, stifling life of servitude in which they must conform to various social and moral codes dictated by patriarchal institutions and traditions. They become “criadas para el hogar, siervas del cura, sacerdotisas del dios ‘qué dirán’ y la diosa ‘costumbre,’ cerradas a toda innovación, sin más horizontes que el matrimonio y la procreación de unos hijos para lo que ninguna preparación reciben, de lo que únicamente pueden ser *la madre*…” (Montseny, *El problema* 15). The middle- and bourgeois classes’ constant preoccupation with appearances, and their incessant attempts to conform to established codes of conduct, were two modes of Spanish life which frustrated not only Montseny’s libertarian nature, but her overall quest for progressive reform.

One institution in particular (and the Catholic Church by extension) is the object of critique in “Maternidad”: Madrid’s charitable maternity hospital and orphanage, the *Casa de maternidad* and the attached *Inclusa*, both run by Catholic nuns. Carmen de Burgos had
already revealed the realities of these institutional settings for women and children in *La rampa.* In Montseny’s “Maternidad,” the omniscient narrator makes explicit reference to this same region of Madrid, in which the hypocrisy of charitable institutions in Spanish society is palpable. The language specifying this locale is laden with cynicism, even judgment: “El barrio de Lavapiés se convirtió en teatro de un drama social, que, con la simple y muda elocuencia de la realidad, una vez más demostró el desorden de la actual sociedad” (“Maternidad” 3). By depicting this site as a theater for social drama, Montseny highlights the way in which the existence of this institution deceptively presents the problems associated with single motherhood and abandoned children as if they were confined to the walls of these institutions, when in fact they permeated Spanish society as a whole. Furthermore, when readers learn that Inés fled to this Madrilenian institution in order to hide her pregnancy, the ward is not mentioned by name, but alluded to through the use of descriptive, and rather derogatory, language: “Por ocultarlo fue a Madrid, a dar a luz a una casa desconocida, a uno de esos discretos templos de misterio, creados por la hipocresía, que tantos dramas y tantos dolores y tantas vergüenzas acogen diariamente” (6). This unfavorable portrayal is an obvious critique of both middle-class moral values and the purportedly benevolent institutions created to uphold this bourgeois façade. Finally, when a grown-up Inesita looks back on the newly revealed details of her earliest days of life, she feels an enormous sense of gratitude for the generous woman who claimed her, “salvándola de la

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268 Though Burgos’s analysis focuses primarily on the pregnant women in the institution, there is one poignant scene in which her protagonist (Isabel) strays from the communal space of the ward and approaches the separate space of the *Inclusa.* This chapter is titled “El grito penetrante,” a phrase that refers to the expression of fear and anguish within the consciences of those mothers who are forced to leave their children in the orphanage to become “las pobres incluseras” (Burgos, *La rampa* 125-32). By critically considering this chapter in *La rampa,* readers can surmise that the *Inclusa,* like the *Casa de maternidad,* is complicit in the maintenance of the falsely romanticized maternal role which was central to the ángel del hogar paradigm.
Inclusa, del horror de los hijos sin padres, del frío espantoso de la caridad oficial” (21). This brief literary attack of the Casa de maternidad and the Inclusa in “Maternidad” is on the one hand indicative of Montseny’s anticlerical stance, as she critiques the hypocritical nature of this charitable institution affiliated with Catholicism. On the other hand, however, it points to the institutional forces which frustrated every woman’s ability – her right – to enact conscious motherhood. Unlike married women, single mothers like Inés were encouraged, even before their child’s birth, to consider their pregnancy a burden.

Returning to the case of the adoptive mother Valentina, her own maternal experience is abruptly terminated by a judicial ruling: “una ley que nunca como entonces demostró ser absurda” (8). Montseny has clearly constructed the narrative in such a way that it guides the reader to feel sympathy for this woman, forced to give up her newly adopted daughter, “contra toda razón y justicia” (4). Despite the fact that she had not given birth to the child, Valentina’s intense desire to become a mother was sufficient to establish a type of maternal bond with the child. The narrator suggests that the maternal role can thus be appropriated by any woman, and thus not entirely dependent on natural biological forces. Historically, Nash points out that the growing medical discourse surrounding maternity at this time was in no way homogenous, despite the fact that it nevertheless continued to associate maternal duties with women and femininity (“Maternidad” 691). She goes on to explain:

Para muchos médicos el deber femenino de la maternidad desborda la propia maternidad biológica para abarcar una maternidad social, ya que se entiende

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269 Again, this critique of the inclusa harks back to Burgos’s La rampa, in which “Colombine” describes the tragic fate of the children left there by their mothers. Unlike boys, who were allowed to leave at a certain age, the girls were only able to leave the inclusa if they professed their dedication to religious life or if a man came to propose marriage: “Algunas podían escapar del Hospicio profesando en conventos donde hacían falta músicas o cantoras, y a veces por un matrimonio en el que un hombre iba a buscarlas como van a buscar las bestias las ferias cuando las necesitan” (La rampa 131).

270 According to Alcalde, Montseny aimed to “acabar con la beneficencia y la caridad, tan en boga en aquellas épocas en España” (57).
que todas las mujeres son madres en potencia. Esta maternidad social permitiría el desarrollo de los sentimientos ‘gloriosamente maternales’ de aquellas mujeres sin hijos que podían desarrollar su misión social de la maternidad con su servicio a los hijos de los demás. (691, my emphasis)

In Montseny’s “Maternidad,” this social maternity is shown to have created a powerful and beneficial bond between the two women when they are reunited years later: “Se sentían tan madre y tan hija, como si la una hubiese sufrido todos los dolores de la maternidad y la otra gozado toda la alegría de ser ansiada, mimada, adorada hija” (24). The contrast between Valentina’s love for Inesita and the aloof sentiment that Inés felt for her own daughter is apparent throughout the novela.

“Maternidad” also makes clear that the imposition of what the narrator refers to as an absurd law (“ley absurda”) not only has a negative impact on mothers, but it also sacrifices, or makes secondary, the well-being of innocent young children. In Montseny’s eyes, this is a grave shortcoming, as she considered children to be representative of the future. Prado explains that one of the missions of anarchism was to rescue the figure of the mother from the injustice of a perverse bourgeois morality that prevented her from putting into practice her supposedly natural maternal instincts (230). As one component of this project, novelas like as those appearing in La Novela Ideal attacked such bourgeois moral codes and practices as the criteria for defining a child as legitimate or illegitimate, the creation of institutions to hide pregnancy, and the resulting destruction of the mother-child bond that occurred through voluntary or involuntary separation.271 In “Maternidad,” readers learn that Inesita has lacked...
true maternal love and care, and her birth mother viewed her as an eternal symbol of her own disgraced past. As the biological mother, Montseny’s Inés illustrates why maternity should be a conscious decision. If a woman has not been voluntarily able to embrace her maternity and subsequent maternal role, both she and her child suffer. The child will ultimately lack love and adequate care, while the mother will feel enslaved by, and look negatively upon, her own maternity. Consequently, these social practices create a vicious cycle that forcefully stifles those progressive social changes that might allow for the feasible progression towards an imagined, ideal society.

As a child mothered by two women, however, Inesita is in fact representative of Montseny’s concept of a regenerative future. In this novel, the young protagonist ultimately determines her own personal moral code which both defines the terms of voluntary motherhood and stands in stark contrast to the oppressive morality of the bourgeois middle-class to which her own birth mother had belonged. Her relationship with Manuel, her intimate childhood friend from a working-class family, is resuscitated when the two grown individuals coincidentally meet in Madrid. As a teenager, Inesita’s mother (Inés) had objected to the relationship between the two, predominantly on classist preoccupations, since Manuel was the son of a farmer. Yet Inesita had never given up hope that she would be reunited with Manuel, with whom she was passionately enamored. Upon confronting her birth mother about her own personal history and her intentions to continue seeing Manuel despite her mother’s objections, Inesita suggests that she has already engaged in a sexual

permite que la mujer tenga un hijo ‘ilegítimo’, y de ser así, la estructura social tiene sus instituciones para esconderlo, alejarlo de la madre a la que el hijo tiene derecho, y separar a la madre de su hijo” (230).

The narrator explains: “Sea por temor a las quejas del marido, sea por odio al padre de la criatura, sea por la propia y honda pesadumbre de la madre, la pobre niña tuvo una penosa y extraña infancia. No la maltrataban. La cuidaban con rigurosa exactitud, con orden mecánico. El padre adoptivo la miraba sin pena ni gloria, como una extraña, tranquilo porque veía la preferencia de la madre por los dos hijos menores, los suyos. Y la madre a veces permanecía semanas enteras sin darla un beso, sin dirigirla una mirada de ternura” (12).
relationship with him. Inés is furious, and her angry words both insult her daughter and reveal her preoccupation with maintaining appearances: “¡Qué escándalo! … ¿Qué voy a tolerar esa vergüenza? … ¿Qué dices, desgraciada? ¡Dios Santo! ¿Es posible que hayas llegado a un tal abandono de ti? ¿Es que quieres matarme de pena?” (25). Inesita remains insistent however, declaring that limits and restrictions should not be placed on true mutual love. She further rejects what she perceives to be her mother’s faulty, and antiquated, understanding of morality: “¿Inmoralidad? … ¿Es inmoral querer y darse al hombre amado? ¿Es inmoral levantar al amor sobre todo prejuicio de clase y convencionalismo social, libertarlo y dignificarlo… y consagrarlo en el templo del corazón con la sola ley de la voluntad mutua?” (25-26). For Inesita, her mother’s understanding of moral virtue is in reality akin to a degenerative vice: “moral de salvajes, que condena en la mujer la libertad de amar y de ser madre, engendrando el infanticidio, consagrando el pecado, embruqueciendo a la Humanidad” (29). Perhaps more importantly, when Inesita rejects these bourgeois roots, she does so in favor of the working class, socially conscious individualist ideals espoused by Manuel, now a revolutionary fighting for justice and social order. Inesita’s impending union with Manuel underscores her renunciation of the middle-class, bourgeois values of her mother’s conservative generation.

Finally, Inés conspires to send her daughter away to a convent, worried about the potential consequences that may follow her relationship with Manuel, whom she refers to as a “palurdo de hortelano” (26). Inesita’s angry response foregrounds her mother’s hypocritical morality: “Si fuese un señorito, la deshonra no sería tan grande, ¿verdad?” (26). With this ironic statement, Inesita proceeds to break with both her mother and the moral code to which she adheres. Her departure from her birth mother’s home is especially meaningful,
as she rejects the institutionally sanctioned formulations of motherhood and instead muses over two dramatically distinct types of conscious maternity: a social maternity, represented by Valentina, and her own potential maternity occurring outside the context of marriage. She goes as far as to deny her biological mother: “Mi madre no es la madre que me abandonó al nacer y quiso llevarme a la Inclusa. Mi madre es la que de la muerte cierta me salvó… gracias a ella no fue condenada a ser un detritus humano, carne de esclavitud y de lupanar” (27). Even more, she revokes her birth mother’s claim to maternal rights, implying that she had lost those rights the moment in which she chose to leave her infant daughter behind in

the Inclusa. In defense of her own rather brazen rebellion, Inesita declares:

Derechos tendría usted sobre mí, sí, en vez de recogerme, robándome a un cariño sincero, me hubiera usted acogido desde el nacer con la alegría generosa y desinteresada de la maternidad. Derechos, mil derechos, los más santos y puros y heroicos derechos tendría, sí, soltera y con el hijo en brazos, en vez de llevarlo a la inclusa, se hubiera erguido ante el mundo entero, desafiándolo, luchando con él, conquistando a puños la vida, siendo madre, en una palabra…. fue usted cobarde y débil y estéril de energías y de corazón.

(27)

For Inesita, motherhood and maternity constitute much more than merely giving birth to, educating, and maintaining a child.

Ultimately, the actions of the young protagonist in this tale position her as a variety of Montseny’s “mujer nueva.” She will assist in redefining the social order and status quo that surrounds her by establishing both her own moral code and unique family unit. Inesita confronts her biological mother, denies her of any maternal rights, and finally (re)integrates
herself into the home of Valentina – her true mother.\textsuperscript{273} By refusing the authoritative fanaticism of her biological mother and opting instead for the generous care offered by her “social” mother, she effectively destabilizes conservative tendencies towards essential motherhood. By the end of “Maternidad,” Inesita, Manuel and Valentina, “la madre verdadera,” form a new family unit. This innovative family structure is representative of Montseny’s hope for a future which will undoubtedly be distinct from both the traditional past, and even the current transformative moment. Inesita, the youthful, self-aware female protagonist, ultimately redefines maternity in her own terms, liberating herself from what she understood to be a savage form of morality that informed – and deformed – her two mothers’ maternal experiences.

\textbf{Motherhood as Creative Female Agency in “El derecho al hijo” (1927)}

Turning to the second novela, “El derecho al hijo,” this narrative presents what may be considered the most polemic issue behind women’s expression of maternity in Spain – voluntary single motherhood. We must recall that Montseny, like Burgos and Nelken, was an adamant supporter of conscious motherhood, or “maternidad consciente” (Montseny, \textit{El problema} 27-30). However, unlike her two contemporaries, Montseny had a tendency to promote the positive exercise of this choice for all women, regardless of marital status. That is, primordial to her philosophy was the conscious decision \textit{to become} a mother, rather than to refuse the maternal role. Such a position does not necessarily indicate that she negatively judged women who chose \textit{not} to become mothers; to judge such a personal decision would

\textsuperscript{273} Inesita refers to Valentina as: “mi otra madre, la generosa y abnegada, la que… quiso darme la más noble y verdadera maternidad” (28).
have been at odds with her libertarian philosophy. Nonetheless, she encouraged women to evaluate motherhood favorably, not simply as a natural, and specifically female capability, but more importantly as a woman’s individual right. In “El derecho al hijo,” a novela published in *La Novela Ideal* in 1928, Montseny explores motherhood as an individual right. As the title indicates, this short narrative foregrounds the concept of “rights,” specifically as they are manifest in the context of procreation. While some first-wave European feminists discussed equal rights in legal or political terms, Montseny frames the issue of rights here as a decidedly individualist imperative which inherently interpolates women’s personal autonomy and reproductive capacity.

Despite the fact that her celebration of maternity often placed her ideology in the risky category of “essential motherhood,” Montseny nevertheless conceived of the mother role as a voluntary one, which ultimately could empower women by allowing them to take full control over their decision to have children. Yet she clearly privileged the positive enactment of this maternal choice. Montseny’s concept of maternity curiously approached the discourse of an artistic manifesto, akin to those which the avant-garde popularized. For Montseny, “maternidad… una de las bellas artes,” was indeed an aesthetic capacity over which women should be able to exert ultimate control (Nash, “Dos intelectuales” 82). In the context of individualist-anarchism, it was thought that social institutions and regulations (specifically, church and state sanctioned marriages and the labeling of “legitimate” and “illegitimate” children) prevented women from exercising this natural right. If we recall

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274 In this sense, Montseny’s formulation of “essential motherhood” is a bit different than DiQuinzio’s definition. For DiQuinzio, those who subscribe to some form of the doctrine of “essential motherhood” inevitably define women who are not mothers as deviant: “Essential motherhood dictates that all women want to be and should be mothers and clearly implies that women who do not manifest the qualities required by mothering and/or refuse mothering are deviant of deficient as women” (xiii). This negative labeling of those who refuse motherhood is absent from Montseny’s literature.
Prado’s explanation of the way in which women’s maternal freedom factored heavily into the anarchist agenda disseminated by *La Revista Blanca*,²⁷⁵ it is appropriate to say that Montseny is one of the first Spanish women to unambiguously affirm a woman’s right to single motherhood.

Beginning with the plot of this *novela*, the protagonist, Rosa María, is a single woman of approximately thirty-one years old who had been protected by her grandfather and aunt nearly all her life. She was left an orphan, as her mother had died in childbirth and her father died when she was only three years old. Her grandfather, Don Marcelino, and her aunt Adela “la guardaban como un tesoro” (5), had sent her away for an education in an aristocratic convent. Upon her return at sixteen, she fell in love with Roger, a young man of twenty-three working on her grandfather’s estate. Noting the intimacy of the two, and fearing “un percance prematuro,” her grandfather sends Roger to work in America (11). Throughout her twenties, Rosa María continuously rejected each and every suitor her grandfather brought to her: “No me gustan los pretendientes que me propones. Y como no me gustan, prefiero quedarme soltera… Pues elijo entre el matrimonio y la soltería. Me quedo soltera” (12).

Nearly fifteen years pass, and Roger returns. Despite the fact that he is married with a family, the love between he and Rosa María has not died, and they melodramatically lament the impossibility of this love and the moral turmoil it causes them. Promptly, Rosa María devises a “plan” which she believes will remedy her loneliness, give purpose to her life, and free Roger of both his emotional angst and the guilt he feels for having left her alone. She will

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²⁷⁵ Prado states: “El último aspecto del proyecto anarco-feminista de liberación de la mujer es el de la liberación maternal. El anarquismo de *La Revista Blanca* (a diferencia de otras tendencias, como la neomaltusiana de *Salud y Fuerza*) creía que la maternidad estaba esencialmente ligada a la identidad de la mujer. Esta concepción era compartida tanto por las posiciones masculinas como por las femeninas. Por tanto, uno de los compromisos que notamos es su denuncia al sistema social imperante que no permite que la mujer desarrolle sus supuestas innatas facultades maternales” (230).
convince Roger to give her “un hijo del amor, el hijo a que toda mujer tiene derecho” (30). Before Roger leaves the hacienda to return to his family, the two have a sexual encounter which results in a pregnancy for Rosa María. She is ultimately “feliz, muy feliz dentro de sí misma, alegrada y rejuvenecida con aquél porvenir que llevaba en ella” (29). While her tía Adela is horrified that her niece will give birth to a child she refers to as “un bastardo,” Rosa María feels a great sense of pride and satisfaction as she contemplates her future, “sola con su hijo” (31). This final chapter is curiously entitled “El poema del hijo” (28), which eloquently infuses Rosa María’s maternity with an artistic component.

There are striking similarities between the protagonist of this novel and Vida, the protagonist of La indomable, most notably pertaining to these women’s views on motherhood. While Vida insisted that she would never become a mother owing to the absence of the “hombre ideal” for whom she waited (and she continues to wait at the end of the novel), Rosa María also patiently awaits a specific man whom she might consider a worthy partner. After Roger was encouraged to leave, “encerróse aún más Rosa María y con mayor firmeza rechazó todos los partidos que le proponía su abuelo” (12). She insists on her ideal: “No me gustan los pretendientes que me propones. Y como no me gustan, prefiero quedarme soltera […] Tengo un sueño, y mientras no vea realizado mi sueño, esperaré” (12). The narrator explains the ineffable quality of her object of desire: “aquel [amor] en que él, un él único entre ellos, ha de llegar” (13). The chapter in which Roger returns, entitled “Él llega,” foreshadows the upcoming, reignited bond between the two former lovers. Since Roger has a family, Rosa María understands that he cannot abandon his obligation to them. Despite this recognition, she is initially devastated by what she perceives to be her lonely future: “¿Y yo agonizando entre estas cuatro paredes… en una existencia sin objeto, sin goce,
sin esperanza ni ilusión?... ¿Qué esperaré ya? [...] El fin de esta casa, la desaparición de un nombre, el ocaso de una familia, que en mí se extinguirá. No habré conocido ni el amor de amante, ni el amor de madre” (19-20). As she is convinced she has found her one, ideal partner, she bemoans the idea that her maternal desire will be left unsatisfied: “Y ella, tan madre, estaba sentenciada a no serlo jamás” (22, my emphasis). The use of the word “sentenced” implies that Rosa María views motherhood and marriage as mutually dependent, and she is thus a passive and helpless victim of this social order.

Yet Rosa María’s exasperation is short-lived, and she too begins to take on the traits of Montseny’s “mujer-moderna,” determining with a powerful vital force to take her fate into her own hands: “En su conciencia de mujer… empezaba a formularse una sobrehumana protesta” (22). This ultimate protest is manifest in her determination to have a child: “De sus entrañas, de todo su ser… subía un clamor desesperado, una solicitud suprema: ¡Un hijito, un pedacito de carne, sobre el que vaciar mi ternura, al que dedicar todas mis horas, por el que vivir y por el cual morir!” (22). Significantly, unlike Vida, la indomable, Rosa María had not been inculcated from an early age with a libertarian education encouraging her to take on such an independent, even rebellious lifestyle. Quite the contrary, she has taken it upon herself to challenge traditional expectations, transforming herself into the individualized “superwoman” (“sobre-humano”) that Vida represented. This is a crucial component of this novela, as it suggests that the process of self-recognition and self-education necessary for women to practice individualizamiento is in fact open to any individual: any woman with an awareness of her own self-worth and individual vitality, not merely to highly educated, free-thinking anarcho-feminists like Montseny, or her alter-ego Vida. In Rosa María’s case, she
ultimately chooses to challenge the conventional notion that a single woman like herself should not – or could not – become a mother.

There are two crucial components of Rosa María’s decision, and desire, to have a child, however. One is her bold rejection of tradition and the values of her contemporary society (here, she is similar to both Vida of La indomable and Inesita of “Maternidad”). As Roger considers the possibility that their sexual encounter may result in a pregnancy before he departs, he worriedly asks Rosa María, “Y qué será de ti, ofrecida a toda la ferocidad y preocupación del pueblo, víctima propiciatoria de todo el fanatismo y de todo el afán primitivo de devorar?” (27). Her response indicates her disdain for a culture that would prefer to see her lonely and unloved, rather than permit her to more profoundly enjoy her life and exercise her individual rights through motherhood: “¿Qué hubiera sido de mí, sin ningún objeto de vida, en la soledad y en la desolación?” (22). Furthermore, when she nonchalantly informs her tía Adela that she will have a child with Roger, Rosa María counters her aunts bourgeois moral code with her own rationale: “No la he cometido con un hombre casado. La he cometido con aquel Roger que amé desde la adolescencia, que he amado toda mi vida, mi esposo natural y legítimo ante mi alma” (30). Rosa María’s consideration of her pregnancy, and of her relationship with Roger, are clearly informed by Montseny’s proposed individualizamiento, or “amor sin convivencia” (El problema 24). A second impulse behind Rosa María’s desire for motherhood resides in her view of maternity as an art form – as her own creation which will ultimately contribute to the future of humanity. Because her pregnancy was desired and she approached motherhood voluntarily, Rosa María does not look upon her future child or maternal responsibilities as a burden (as did Inés, in “Maternidad,” for example). On the contrary, it is the ultimate way of exercising her
individual agency and rights. Montseny’s opinion of voluntary motherhood certainly influenced her depiction of Rosa María:

\[ Y \text{ la mujer, cuando lleva a gusto, voluntariamente, por deseo íntimo y decisión propia, un embarazo; cuando amamanta un hijo en el cual ha puesto todas las ilusiones de su vida, no se siente esclava… Ninguna madre considera esclavitud ese romance irreal, poético, entre cuyas rimas se han abierto y se han desarrollado las fibras mejores y más sensibles de su alma. (El problema 35, emphasis mine) }\]

Unlike Burgos and Nelken, Montseny does not incorporate the potentially negative consequences of motherhood into her discussion of the maternal experience. In reality, motherhood often brought extreme sacrifice, limitations, and pain to Spanish women (and we have seen how Burgos concentrated on this reality in La rampa). Yet more than Burgos and Nelken, Montseny consistently orients her discourse towards an entirely renovated, distinctly new future which would bear few similarities to the present. As an independent woman who has decided to break with tradition and voluntarily raise a child, Rosa María will have the opportunity to continue shaping and restructuring the values of her culture by educating and instilling her own values in her child. In this sense, Montseny’s advocacy of voluntary motherhood is less pragmatic and more ideological than Burgos’s and Nelken’s, yet her forceful advocacy for complete individual liberty, even in gender-specific experiences like maternity, makes her anarcho-feminism the most radical.

Advancing Montseny’s idealistic conception of maternity further, we might consider that, just as the male poets and artists of the various avant-garde movements boasted iconoclastic aesthetics that “deliberately rupture centuries of hallowed conventions so basic
that most people had ceased to be aware of them as conventions” (Harris, “Squared” 3), the modern women in Montseny’s novelas break with traditional moral and social values through an iconoclastic evaluation of motherhood. They actively and consciously embrace maternity as the ultimate form of individual expression. Even more, while Vicente Huidobro declared the creative power of the poet to be on par with that of a god – “el poeta es un pequeño Dios” – Montseny insists that the creative power of women elevates them beyond the status of gods: “Las madres son más que los dioses” (La indomable 123). For Montseny, a woman must view maternity with a “concepción artística” (El problema 35). As a voluntary act of creativity and free will, then, maternity will no longer impede the modern woman by relegating her to a passive pawn within a marriage or from an unexpected pregnancy, but rather enrich her life as an actively chosen individual imperative:

La mujer moderna soporta alegremente molestias cada día disminuidas, y la maldición bíblica; “Parirás con dolor,” va afortunadamente desapareciendo, gracias a la ciencia. Hoy, el nuevo Evangelio de la mujer es “Engendrarás voluntaria y conscientemente y parirás con amor. Tus hijos serán tus frutos y tus joyas.” (El problema 35).276

We might consider this new and radical “women’s gospel,” as Montseny terms it, as an anarcho-feminist variation of the impulse behind the diverse avant-garde manifestos. The author even declares that this tenet must occupy the central position of contemporary feminist movements, which fail to address the centrality of reproductive freedom: “Han de ser… la reivindicación mínima de todos los movimientos feministas del mundo” (36). She

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276 Montseny’s essay also credits modern advances in hygiene and lifestyle with diminishing the physical burdens of pregnancy: “Y la higiene moderna, la vida moderna, el cultivo de la belleza física, los deportes, la gimnasia, desarrollando el cuerpo femenino, han terminado también con ese concepto del embarazo como una enfermedad que dura nueve meses” (El problema 35).
demands that women insist on their own reproductive rights: “Libertad de procreación voluntaria para la mujer, dentro o fuera de compromiso matrimonial. Garantía social y económica para todos los hijos, sin distinción de legitimidad ni de ilegitimidad” (36). Placing maternity within the context of women’s rights is a bold move. Such maneuver attempts to both remove patriarchal (political, social, and institutional) controls over motherhood by approaching women’s reproductive capacity nonsexually, as a difference-based form of bodily autonomy.

In “El derecho al hijo,” Rosa María represents a young woman willing to adhere to this new manifesto. Unlike Inés in “Maternidad” or Libertad in Nelken’s La trampa del arenal (the first hiding her maternity in shame, the second ruling out motherhood and leaving Spain), Rosa María refuses to validate external judgments or scorn for her decision, or to deny herself the experience of motherhood. She proudly affirms to her conservative aunt that she will indeed have a child: “Un hijo del amor, el hijo a que toda mujer tiene derecho” (30), and she reiterates this decision with her rhetorical question: “¿Y no crees que toda mujer tiene derecho a ser madre, tiene derecho al hijo?” (30). Though it may be difficult, or even impossible, for the present Spanish society to approve of this decision, Rosa María does not desire the approval or acceptance of others. She looks only to herself. As the novela ends, she is portrayed as a liberated, independent woman who is prepared to face the world: “… la mujer que reivindicó el derecho al hijo, el derecho al porvenir. Y ella, sola contra todos, sola contra cien siglos de opresión y de fanatismo, contra cien morales destructoras, encadenadoras de la naturaleza y de la vida. Ella, sola con su hijo” (31).

Again, we see echoes of Montseny’s “nuevo tipo de mujer” in this protagonist: “Para esta mujer que se valga a sí misma, que desprecie y se sobreponga al ambiente, los hijos
serán la florescencia delirante de la pasión tan cuidadosamente alimentada. Ellos consolidarán su vida; serán cauce donde desbordarse” (El problema 29). In both her fiction and essays, Montseny’s truly liberated female protagonists must acknowledge that contemporary traditions and institutions denied women certain individual rights to which they were entitled. She promoted the idea that the only connection between procreation (or sexual relations) and marriage was that which was imposed by social conventions (Tavera, Federica 69). Thus, in Montseny’s opinion, it was not male resistance that represented the most serious challenge to equality, but rather the fact that so many Spanish women remained enslaved by traditional attitudes and beliefs. In both “Maternidad” and “El derecho al hijo,” Federica Montseny experiments with the paradoxical politics of motherhood that result from her tendency to privilege aspects of essential motherhood within her individualist, anarcho-feminist philosophy. In the process, she elaborates extremely heterogeneous representations of motherhood. On one hand, she theorizes maternity as an art form (“el arte de la maternidad”), a maneuver that allows her to eschew, even sidestep the potential “anti-feminist” pitfall latent in essential motherhood that might portray childless women negatively, or deny the heterogeneity of maternity. On the other hand, she emphasizes maternity as a woman’s individual right, and thus expands the narrow definition of motherhood which was dependent on a variety of social and institutional contingencies (such as bourgeois morality and marriage) that ultimately stifled women’s freedom to exercise their social, legal, political, and especially, maternal rights.

**Conclusion**
As we have seen, the concept of the individual, and particularly the personal autonomy to which this individual is entitled in a free society, rests at the center of Montseny’s literature and anarcho-feminist project. This focus on individualism, however, leads Montseny to difficult paradoxes when it comes to gender-specific experiences and concerns like motherhood and maternity. In general, unlike the didactic narratives of Burgos, or the socially compromised essays of Nelken, Montseny does not offer her readers specific, practical advice or solutions, but rather entirely new modes of thinking about their unique situation as female, potentially maternal, individuals. Her revolutionary approach to motherhood indeed reverberated in Spanish cities (and novels like La victoria and El hijo de Clara provoked reactions in Madrid and even Paris). Johnson even suggests that Concha Espina, writing from Madrid, may have penned her novel, La virgen prudente (1929), in response to Montseny’s polemic narratives on single motherhood (Gender and Nation 257).

Despite the controversy and even the impracticality of Montseny’s propositions, she nevertheless magnified the presence of motherhood within public discourse by articulating maternity outside of bourgeoisie morality in terms of individual, female rights. She consistently orient her vision towards the future, and insists on recognizing the gender-specific, yet unalienable right of women to control and exercise their own maternity. Her ultimate motives are not necessarily to stir a dramatic, immediate social revolution, but rather to demonstrate to young Spanish women that they must begin to challenge the status quo –

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277 Tavera documents the controversy which these two novels provoked, and she summarized Montseny’s three separate articles defending Clara (the female protagonist) (Federica 80-89). Shortly after the initial publication of La victoria in 1925, for example, “el alboroto llegaba hasta periódicos tan alejados territorial e ideológicamente como El Sol de Madrid, pero se aposentaría sobre todo en las mismas páginas de La Revista Blanca” (81). El hijo de Clara, the sequel to La victoria, caused controversy even outside of Spain, prompting editorials in the French publication L’En Dehors (85).
no matter how difficult – in order to obtain a progressive, egalitarian future in which the obstacles of the present moment would be eradicated.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

[I]t is a poignant fact of literary history that a woman who wrote powerful prose aimed at improving society’s estimation and treatment of women would herself nearly disappear from the historical record.

As the Second Spanish Republic finally came to fruition in 1931, it seemed that Spain was in fact entering an unprecedented epoch of gender equality. Among the numerous (but still controversial) social and legal reforms benefitting women that were ushered in during this new era of liberal democracy were the rights to suffrage and divorce. Women like Margarita Nelken and Federica Montseny even managed to participate directly in government, contributing to the creation and implementation of public and legal policies which would reflect the concerns of first-wave feminism. Yet for as revolutionary as these

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278 Despite having won the right to vote, women’s suffrage remained a controversial issue among feminists and anti-feminist alike. Nelken, for instance, expressed her concern that conservative, uneducated Spanish women might endanger the Republic by voting based on advice from husbands or confessors (*La mujer ante las Cortes* 30-32). Victoria Kent also worried that women were unprepared to exercise their right to vote, given that they had not yet begun to realize the benefits that the Republic would provide them (Scanlon 276-77). Regarding the newly approved articles on divorce, Scanlon explains that article 43 of the constitution guaranteed women the right to divorce, regardless of the motives or the desires of their husbands, thus making the law one of the most liberal in Europe (265). The divorce law was one of several anticlerical measures incorporated into the constitution for the purpose of limiting the power of the Catholic Church in the private lives of Spanish citizens (266). While there were many reasons which would enable a wife (or husband) to request divorce, the most liberal article of the new law was that which permitted the dissolution of marriage based solely on the mutual decision of the spouses, without the requisite of adultery, neglect, abuse, or any other of the fourteen “causas” listed in the declaration. See Scanlon for the complete list of fourteen “causas,” for the additional specifications informing article 43, and for contemporary reactions to and criticism of the article from feminists like Margarita Nelken and Clara Campoamor, as well as from anti-feminist reactionaries (265-72).

279 Victoria Kent and Clara Campoamor were also vocal women who participated in the Spanish government during the thirties. Mangini explains that in the first elections of the Second Republic, Kent, Campoamor, and Nelken won seats in parliament, and Montseny was elected Minister of Health (*Las modernas* 199-200). The rise of women in these public positions inspired hope in an entire generation of women who, for the first time, witnessed the veritable “ascensión al cielo” of educated, hard-working, middle-class women (201).
modifications may have been, in reality, as Margarita Nelken pointed out in 1931, a large portion of the female populace in Spain still lacked the education and social awareness necessary to make informed decisions regarding their own rights and entitlements (La mujer ante las cortes 21-27). In this renovated social landscape, many of the prolific women writers of the early twentieth century, including both Nelken and Montseny, became increasingly involved in politics and traveled the nation giving impassioned speeches as a way of educating the masses and spreading the merits of their respective reformist agendas. Consequently, they devoted less attention to publishing fiction. In fact, the thirties promptly became a decade of political turmoil and incessant struggle, and the newly established liberal ideology of the Republic would ultimately be defeated at the hands of a conservative, right-wing dictatorship in 1939. Concerning women’s writing, the subsequent decades are a dramatic contrast to the Spanish cultural landscape of the roaring twenties, in which women published prolifically in genres ranging from novels, short novellas, journalistic articles, and essays.  

As we have seen throughout this study, motherhood had indeed been a core component of the ideology of even the most feminist of Spanish women. Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny each fought for social reforms that would allow motherhood to be a consciously chosen, voluntary role, rather than an obligatory female destiny. In confronting and theorizing the “maternal dilemma” throughout the 1920s, these women sparked a complex and ongoing transformation in the characteristics of (and attitudes towards) the most revered, traditional estimations of women as mothers. The feminist appropriations of maternal values and motherhood within Burgos’s, Nelken’s, and Montseny’s fiction and

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280 Magnini compares the Roaring Twenties of the United States with the “años felices” of 1920s Spain, when “el fenómeno de la mujer moderna que irrumpió en el mundo público a principios de siglo, y sobre todo en los años de la guerra y la posguerra, llegó a su plenitud” (Las modernas 75).
essays instigated a radical, feminist conception of the mother-role which threatened the very foundations of Spain’s conservative, patriarchal society. By rejecting a unilaterally defined, idealized model of femininity based on motherhood whilst simultaneously taking control of the representations of the maternal role in literature, Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny created exceptional, heterogeneous interpretations of motherhood which could accommodate and even combine a variety of female roles and identities. Such a mission promoted a general sense of autonomy for Spanish women.

Certainly, conservative, patriarchal institutions and powers took notice of this shift. This is clearly reflected in the fact that, upon Franco’s ascent to power, a core component of the dictator’s ideology asserted that “women’s primary social function was motherhood… Women could be politicized only through the notion of fulfilling a common female destiny based on their reproductive function (Nash, *Defying* 183).\(^{281}\) Also at this time, in the intellectual world, “both literary and social modernism came to an abrupt end” (Johnson, *Gender and Nation* 275). Consequently, the forward-thinking, feminist inclined social narratives of women like Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny had essentially disappeared from the public record, destroyed at the hands of the Phalange Party (275). These narratives were replaced by *novelas rosas* and fictional tales starring female protagonists who were able to find fulfillment only through the traditional model of womanhood centered on marriage, the domestic sphere, and child-rearing (275-76).\(^{282}\) With the help of the *Sección Femenina*, women were indoctrinated with a conservative ideology that harked back to the domestic

\(^{281}\) Nash further explains that Francoist ideology “marked women off as a separate natural species, identifying them exclusively as mothers whose offspring would check the tendency toward declining birthrates and thus prevent the decadence of Spain.” (*Defying* 183).

\(^{282}\) Johnson specifically names the feminist novels of the three writers in this study – Carmen de Burgos, Margarita Nelken, and Federica Montseny – as being among the narratives erased from public memory and replaced with new, regime-approved *novela rosa* narratives (*Gender and Nation* 275-76).
ángel del hogar and perfecta casada, both of which located maternity at the core of feminine identity. Reinforcing this shift was the fact that the Catholic Church regained the power and influence over personal life that it had lost during the Republican era, and the seemingly utopic promises and freedoms which the Second Republic appeared to have afforded women were in fact short-lived. Suffrage and divorce laws were revoked, and women’s personal aspirations like work, education, and self-fulfillment were categorized as a threat to their reproductive capacity (Nash, Defying 183). In other words, the regime struck down upon one of the most fundamental shared components of Burgos’s, Nelken’s, and Montseny’s first-wave feminist ideology: voluntary motherhood, or maternidad consciente.

This reactionary response suggests the extent to which even Spain’s supposedly conservative first-wave feminist ideology had in fact infiltrated the collective consciousness of Spanish men and women alike. According to historian Mary Nash, by the mid-thirties, the traditional female model of the ángel del hogar, the idealized, submissive wife and mother, “had been disfigured when women were granted political rights. Women’s emancipation was thus denounced as a sign of the moral decadence of the previous democratic regime (Defying 183). Nash’s evaluation clearly represents the perspectives and attitudes of an anxious male population, and thus must be qualified in order to comprehend the more complex social reality informing it. That is, while women were in fact granted political rights upon the birth of the Second Republic in 1931, the so-called “disfiguring” of the maternal role was not an immediate consequence of the transition to democracy. In fact, the metamorphoses of women’s attitudes towards maternity were initiated long before they had won legal and political rights like suffrage. I would argue that it is more appropriate to describe this notable shift not from the hegemonic, male point-of-view employed by Nash which labels it a
threatening “disfigurement,” but rather from a revisionist, female perspective which more adequately renders it a gradual, proactive “refashioning” (which may have begun as early as 1917 with narratives like Burgos’s *La rampa*). As we have seen, throughout the twenties – indeed several years preceding the Second Republic – Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny did indeed participate in the consistent literary refashioning of this traditional model of womanhood based on maternity. Their unique perspectives and the heterogeneous maternal possibilities that they suggested disrupted the idealized model of womanhood – *la perfecta casada* or the *ángel del hogar* – endorsed by both the Catholic Church and the Spanish nation. These alternative representations of Spanish motherhood had disturbed this longstanding feminine ideal to such an extent that Francoist propaganda immediately attempted to discredit all feminist and egalitarian demands by demonstrating that women were not only corrupt, but also in perpetual denial of their maternity – their biological mandate. By re-inscribing the maternal role with the rhetoric of destiny, duty, and obligation, patriarchal powers robbed women of the maternal choice which they had worked so hard to understand, disseminate, and embody.

As DiQuinzio has adroitly observed, “some of feminism’s most pressing, but also most contradictory, demands are issued in the name of motherhood…. Mothering is both an important site at which the central concepts of feminist theory are elaborated, and a site at which these concepts are challenged and reworked” (x-xi). It is especially pertinent, then, to concentrate on motherhood as a central issue within feminist debate in Spain in order to identify the specific concerns of a culture that never entirely rejected that maternal role. By taking into account the way in which Spanish women historically perceived and then modified their relationship to their potential roles as mothers within a modernizing Spanish
culture, we might gain valuable insights into the ways in which these unique perceptions may find echoes in today’s postmodern narratives. Johnson even suggests that in their fiction, today’s Spanish women writers “continue the work of social modernists... in staking a claim for women as equal partners in creating a modern Spanish nation” (Gender and Nation 280). Furthermore, in the conclusion of her study on the intersection of Western European feminism and motherhood, Allen observes that the “maternal dilemma” still exists in today’s contemporary societies, and that an increasing number of women experience its effects:

“Present-day feminists must wrestle with the same problems that perplexed earlier generations... In our approach to these questions, our knowledge of history provides us with invaluable resources” (241). As an example in the Spanish context, in a recent article on Lucía Extebarria’s Un milagro en equilibrio (2004), Silvia Bermúdez notes that the novel’s protagonist, in desiring to write about her pregnancy, must follow “the, apparently, only other woman author in Spain who has dared to write about this particular experience of womanhood: Carme Riera in Tiempo de espera (1998)” (96). This is a curious assertion given the multitude of women authors – including Burgos, Nelken, and Montseny – who

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283 Lisa Vollendorf has also alluded to the potential that first-wave feminism may wield on contemporary feminist activity in the peninsula: “El feminismo que floreció durante la Segunda República se extinguía durante la dictadura de Franco. Sin embargo, la existencia de un movimiento feminista antes de la guerra creó un punto de referencia importante para el activismo feminista en la España posfranquista” (“Introducción” Literatura 20).

284 Johnson descriptively paints the intrinsic connection between the two movements as follows: “Although the momentum for a future of social and legal liberation that women modernists and vanguardists envisioned was stalled for nearly forty years, it only lay dormant (kept smoldering by an underground feminist movement) and was revived in 1975 when Franco finally died” (Gender and Nation 278).

285 Overall, Allen argues that her research calls into question many prevailing views concerning the relationship between feminism and motherhood. Specifically challenged is the argument that feminists were too preoccupied with motherhood and distinctly female functions, thus excluding many women from the movement, as well as the counter-argument that feminists disrespected motherhood and family life. These accusations are baseless for Allen, given that she asserts that her research has uncovered a much more complex reality: “It is true that the feminists discussed in this book sometimes... showed insensitivity to differences of class, religion, and sexual orientation among women. It is not true, however, that they shared a ‘normative’ conception of female nature that was centered on motherhood. On the contrary, their views of motherhood were exceedingly diverse.” (235)
began to both realistically portray and creatively re-imagine the maternal experience several decades before Riera. Given the cyclical, rather than linear trajectory of Spanish feminism throughout the twentieth century, the fundamental contributions of these first-wave Spanish feminists may serve as new theoretical bases for contemporary Spanish feminists and women writers alike.286

As a final consideration, Susan Kirkpatrick has observed that scholar’s preferred use of the term “modernidad española” (or “Spanish modernity”) underscores the necessary questioning of those universalizing explanations of the “modern” (Mujer 17).287 In the same way, scholars who discuss “Spanish feminism,” or “el feminismo español,” inherently question those universalizing tendencies of feminist scholars and historians, a key step for theorizing feminism in a uniquely Spanish cultural milieu. Yet in general, when acknowledging unique aspects of Spanish feminism, these scholars tend to compare it unfavorably to the women’s liberation movements of neighboring countries. By examining the varied feminist representations and redefinitions of motherhood in the Spanish context, the preceding chapters have challenged the claims of critics who denounce Spanish feminism – and indeed the literature of many first-wave Spanish feminists – as essentialist, conservative, or even feminist failures.

As motherhood in particular (and even parenthood in general) was redefined as a form of voluntary self-fulfillment rather than an obligatory duty to family or the nation, a woman’s decision to bear children became only one among many considerations that she might weigh against other opportunities (Allen 240). Each of the women studied here

286 See Chown (100) and Johnson (“Issues and Arguments” 244) regarding the cyclical characteristic of Spanish feminism.
287 Kirkpatrick states: “El uso del término ‘modernidad española’ subraya por sí mismo la necesidad de cuestionar las explicaciones universalizantes de lo moderno” (Mujer 17).
advocated voluntary motherhood in the twenties and thirties; yet they were careful not to explicitly reject motherhood and they were likewise cautious when advocating the maternal role for women of various social classes and levels of education. Carmen de Burgos illustrated the difficulties women might face when making this decision, both materialistically and psychologically, as a way to both caution women and to critique her contemporary society. Margarita Nelken struggled to convince women (and men) of the need for women to secure economic stability by combining their domestic responsibilities as mothers with a fulfilling career in the public sphere. And Federica Montseny idealistically aspired to theorize motherhood in such a way that women might choose it as a means of artistic expression or regeneration, and even embrace it wholeheartedly as their individual right. By concentrating on the way in which these women refashioned the maternal role in their literature, Hispanists will gain a more thorough understanding of Spanish women’s varied feminist positions, of the broader social, political, and cultural scene of the early twentieth century, and of the evolution of gender ideology in the Spanish nation.
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