

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Gian-Paolo Biasin, rev. of Tomasi di Lampedusa, *I Racconti* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1962), I Q, V, no. 20 (1961), p. 129.

<sup>2</sup>Gian-Paolo Biasin, "The Prince and the Siren," *MLN*, 78, No. 1 (Jan. 1963), 31-50.

<sup>3</sup>For our references to the novel see Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo* (Milano, Feltrinelli, 1961). Subsequent references will be indicated in the text.

<sup>4</sup>Simonetta Salvestroni's article, "La Struttura e lo Stile del *Gattopardo*," *Filologia e Lettere*, 17 (1971), pp. 209-237 emphasizes Lampedusa's use of antithesis.

<sup>5</sup>We may recall the Arab occupation of Sicily from the ninth to the eleventh century. See Denis M. Smith, *Medieval Sicily* (New York, Viking Press, 1968), II.

<sup>6</sup>Preface to *Il Gattopardo*, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup>We would mention Lampedusa's unpublished essays on Stendhal, Mérimée, and Flaubert. Both F. S. Orlando in *Ricordo di Lampedusa* (Milano, Scheiwiller, 1963), and the Salvestroni article stress Lampedusa's familiarity with Stendhal.

<sup>8</sup>In *Spectator* (May 13, 1960), p. 702, E. M. Forster writes "The Prince lives on his own account." In *20th Century*, 166 (Oct. 1959), p. 311, Bernard Wall states that "The history is assimilated and seems almost contemporary." The Salvestroni article shows how Lampedusa's use of such adverbs as "oggi" and "adesso" in connection with events occurring a hundred years previously indicate perhaps the author's unconscious participation (pp. 230-231).

<sup>9</sup>The thematic lyricism which is the product of this kind of interiorization of reality is well analyzed by J. F. Le Cercle in *Rousseau et L'Art du roman* (Paris, Colin, 1969), p. 268. In Salvestroni we find a reference to the "dolorosi monologhi interiori del protagonista" (p. 218).

## Role Playing and Motherhood in *La familia de Pascual Duarte*

Camilo José Cela's *La familia de Pascual Duarte* is a bizarrely violent account of a man who slaughters his hunting dog and his horse, stabs a friend, perhaps murders his first wife, kicks a rival to death, and, most horrifying of all, thrusts a dagger into his mother's neck. Criticism of the novel is almost unanimous in viewing the novel as the "history of a human being trapped by his inescapable circumstances and forced by them into acts of atrocity."<sup>1</sup> Pascual Duarte is trapped by "inescapable circumstances," circumstances I define within this essay as self-conceptual and social concerns until now only mentioned by scholars: *hombradía*, *machismo*, and *poderío*.<sup>2</sup> Pascual Duarte expects and demands that everyone comport himself according to completely inflexible rules of conduct. Everyone, male or female, must play Pascual's Game of Roles. To understand this fanaticism of role playing, the greatest of Pascual's flaws and the cause of his ruin, we must look to his greatest crime, the murder of his mother. Why does he creep into a darkened room and mercilessly slaughter an old woman? How can he justify this cowardly act, and what is the meaning of the solace he finds in his savagery?

The fact of the murder itself raises few scholarly eyebrows. Is it not to be expected, since the woman is a "malicious,"<sup>3</sup> "filthy harpy,"<sup>4</sup> whose shallowness is matched only by her brutality?<sup>5</sup> That is what Pascual would have us believe. He denigrates his mother, introducing her with such verbs as *disgustar*, *blasfemar*,

*acabar*, and *matar*, the debilitating adjectives, *poco*, *lento*, *débiles*, *cecrina tísica*, *chupada*, *enmarañada*, *peores* and *malignas*, and the dark, unflattering nouns *luto*, *bigotillo*, *pelambarrera*, *cicatrices*, and *bubas*.<sup>6</sup> But has Pascual shown himself to be the con artist, since only a few pages earlier he reminisces and recalls his childhood home with its kitchen "siempre limpia y blanqueada con primor" (p. 59)? Obviously the mother of the house has a degree of pride in her woman's world. Is she, then, the filthy virago, and, if not, why does Pascual "hate" the woman? Duarte hates *la madre* because she fails to fulfill the feminine role as he interprets that role.

Because Pascual constantly preoccupies himself with the maintenance of a "proper" image, he shoots the life from a dog who stares at him accusingly, stabs his best man who makes a joke which is perhaps insulting, drives a blade over and over into the heaving flanks of a mare who is witness to his ineptitude,<sup>8</sup> and kicks and beats a man to death because of an insulting comment. It is not surprising that he commits his most heinous crime, matricide, because of the same concern. Tortured by the question of what a man should do, he is none the less plagued by what should a woman do. For Duarte the terms woman and mother are inseparable. Every female must be a mother or bear the stigmata of "ese aire doliente de las hembras sin hijos" (p. 124). Though she produces no offspring which survive, the bitch La Chispa has the psychological advantage of Pascual's mother, for at least she has a name. Saintless, stripped of the power of her name, Pascual's mother is *la madre* in every reference; her whole personality, her whole image rests in the term *la madre*. The questions, "What should a woman be?" and "What should a mother be?" are inextricably synonymous.

Pascual's requisites for motherhood include physical beauty and good health, as witness his description of Lola, the robust, handsome village girl destined to be his first wife: "Por el mucho desarrollo que mostraba, cualquiera daría en pensar que se encontraba delante de una madre" (p. 92). Because he finds his own mother physically repulsive, Duarte gives her no more credit for bearing three children than he gave her for her spotless kitchen. She is half barren (p. 71), he insists, and her breasts are empty (p. 74). Her real capacity for motherhood, then is limited by her unmotherly look. Close on the heels of beauty should follow good repute. Pascual himself uses the terms virtue and dignity (p. 71) to describe the boundaries of his science of public esteem. *La madre* is not a model of virtue since she is sexually involved with one don Rafael. As for dignity, the woman loses her son's respect when she screams out during the agonies of childbirth. Worse still, she refuses to put up a semblance of social dignity when she does not weep "como se esperaba" (p. 84) when her husband dies. Pascual avows that the death would be laughable "pensada en frío" (p. 83). *La madre* has every reason to regard the death "en frío," having received nothing but blows from the man. But, according to Pascual's schema she must fulfill her duty and maintain a dignified guise befitting a mother. The shedding of tears is of great importance in Pascual's design. He first entertains the thought of murdering his mother when she does not weep at the pitiable spectacle of her idiot child drowned in a vat of oil. The woman's wings should be clipped, since destructive *animals* have no need of wings. The woman who does not weep, "para nada sirve" (p. 89). When his own child dies, he paradoxically denounces his mother's lamentations and criticizes her lack of "modales" (p. 131). The only explanation for this paradox lies in Pascual's Game of Roles. For the female there is a responsibility even greater than that of mourning the dead. Women must succor the *pater familias*, and, when they fail to do so, they are "ingratas," even "malignas" (p. 132).

When the distraught Lola refuses to fulfill her conjugal duties, *la madre* asserts herself, chastizing Pascual for losing control of his wife. Duarte is perplexed by this disintegration of the rightful order of things, and his frustration and confusion result in a rage specifically directed toward *la madre*, that woman who has constantly failed to measure up to his demands and who now voices her disdain of his "poco arranque," not only robbing him of his "natural" position as irreproachable lord and master of the household but, like the mare, bearing witness to his weakness. For Pascual the natural outlet for the frustrated rage he feels is violence and destruction.

Violence is only delayed when Pascual flees his home. Is *la madre* the *trotaconventos* during his absence who arranges a liaison which results in Lola's pregnancy? Since Duarte hates his mother and since she avoids him, he assumes her complicity, forgetting that two slaughtered animals, a bleeding best man, and his own veiled threats toward his mother prove to the old woman that her son is dangerously unpredictable. Pascual murders Lola's lover and in prison for his crime finds solace in the priest's tale of the Prodigal Son. The overjoyed parent, anxious to forgive and forget, fits in precisely with Pascual's conception of the parental role. Home from prison, he finds no one but *la madre* who seems little pleased to see her son free to commit new atrocities. She does not look like a mother but like a witch. "Por qué me trataría así?" (p. 179), Duarte wonders, ironically amazed that *la madre* is less than biblical, and angry that she is not his dream image.

Remarried and insisting on his right to live in his mother's home, Pascual gradually convinces himself of the need to destroy his mother. He cannot flee; he fled once before, returning to find his wife pregnant and his good name in jeopardy. His manhood, his intense desire to avoid scandal and shame, "will not allow him to flee."<sup>9</sup> Since he cannot run away, he must eliminate *la madre*. But how can he justify matricide? He hoards reasons to slay the old woman, even taking umbrage at her tone of voice and eventually decides that she is not a true mother, but completely counterfeit, (p. 186), and that he must be man enough to destroy this creature that pretends to motherhood. "Era ya cuestión de amor propio" (p. 190). Pascual's first concern is his own self-image, his pride, his reputation, his *hombraída*, and, having convinced himself that his "amor propio" demands that he be the exterminating angel of *la madre* he creeps into her darkened room. Lit by the flame of a single candle, the death scene is a whirlwind of bestial screams and purple-choked, saliva-covered faces. At the exact moment that *la madre* rips her son's nipple from his chest, Pascual plunges his dagger "como un sol" (p. 191) into her neck, drenching himself in his mother's blood.

Pascual feels that his crime is completely justified. Ugly, undignified, unvirtuous, uncompassionate, a dangerous animal who deserves to die, *la madre* has met none of his standards of motherhood. The crime is not matricide for Pascual Duarte, since *la madre* has not been a mother to him.

Roger D. Tinnell  
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<sup>1</sup>David W. Foster, *Forms of the Novel in the Work of Camilo José Cela* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1967), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Sherman Eoff, "Tragedy of the Unwanted Person in Three Versions: Pablo de Segovia, Pito Pérez, Pascual Duarte," *Hispania*, 39 (1956), p. 194, and D. W. McPheeters, *Camilo José Cela* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Ilie, *La novelística de Camilo José Cela* (Madrid: Gredos, 1963), p. 68.

<sup>4</sup>D. W. McPheeters, *Camilo José Cela* (New York: Twayne, 1969), p. 36.

<sup>5</sup>Alonso Zamora Vicente, *Camilo José Cela (Acercamiento a un autor)* (Madrid: Gredos, 1962), p. 28.

<sup>6</sup>Camilo José Cela, *La familia de Pascual Duarte* in *Obra completa Tomo I* (Barcelona: Destino, 1953), pp. 67-68. All references are to this edition.

<sup>7</sup>Ilie, *La novelística*, p. 67.

<sup>8</sup>A conclusion reached by Mary Ann Beck in a sensitive and thorough "Nuevo encuentro con *La familia de Pascual Duarte*," *Revista Hispánica Moderna*, 30 (1964).

<sup>9</sup>McPheeters, *Camilo*, p. 43.