

MAGDALENA MONDRAGON AGUIRRE
HER NOVELS AND PLAYS

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
Thaddeus John Sarnacki
1965

THESIS



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MAGDALENA MONDRAGON AGUIRRE

HER NOVELS AND PLAYS

By

Thaddeus John Sarnacki

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Submitted to
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Con profundo cariño para mi esposa, Bárbara,
que con su aliento diario, su infinita pa-
ciencia, y su inagotable entusiasmo me ayudó
a la composición de esta obra.

Deseo expresar mi agradecimiento al Dr. Carlos M. Terán por su constante ayuda y dirección en la preparación y organización del manuscrito. Además, extendiendo mi deuda de gratitud a la Sra. Magdalena Mondragón Aguirre por haberme graciosamente facilitado su fotografía y datos personales, así como los ejemplares de algunas de sus obras indispensables a la redacción de esta tesis.

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INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this thesis is to show how Magdalena Mondragón Aguirre, contemporary Mexican novelist, dramatist, journalist, etc., qualifies unconditionally in her literary career as a crusader against social injustice. In the past, the majority of the Mexican population fought against injustice with rifles and often with their lives. Magdalena Mondragón fought, and still fights, against injustice with words.

She is a product of her time, born three years after the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution when the underprivileged were struggling to gain recognition as human beings. This struggle is still in process. Through the steadily-increasing efforts of the government to help the population, some progress has been made but much is still untouched.

In her novels of protest, Magdalena Mondragón writes about the deprived people of Mexico and the conditions of the country since the end of the Revolution. She lived, and continues to live, in a country where millions, to this day, exist under sub-standard conditions. Most of her novels deal with unsolved social problems. She exposes and condemns the problems of poverty, racial discrimination, lack of education, etc. that prevail and act as a deterring factor

in the progress of the country. A survey of her works reveals that she writes about the problems one reads of in today's Mexican daily newspapers.

Complete data on Magdalena Mondragón and her productions is difficult to obtain. To supplement information found and received during the research, two telephone conversations and an exchange of letters with her proved invaluable. Magdalena Mondragón kindly sent this writer copies of works which were either out-of-print, unpublished, or recently published.

Because of the importance of Magdalena Mondragón as a contemporary Mexican literary figure and the scarcity of material about her, this thesis includes commentary on available works and a bibliography of all her published works.

Five novels, El día no llega, Tenemos sed, Puede que'l otro año, Más allá existe la tierra, and Yo, como pobre will be discussed, the latter three in depth. Three plays, Cuando Eva se vuelve Adán, ¡Porque me da la gana!, and El mundo perdido will be analyzed.

CHAPTER I

THE MEXICAN MILIEU

The course of events during the Mexican Revolution of 1910 influenced the literary trends and its repercussions are felt even to the present day. We will understand better the revolutionary and post-revolutionary social conditions of Mexico and, in turn, their effects on contemporary literature, if we look back momentarily.

After Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821 there was little peace and less progress in the country. As a result, Mexico continued to be in a chaotic and lawless state of affairs. The activities of the three colonial institutions, namely, the church, the landed aristocracy, and the army were largely responsible for the unrest of the country and the events that eventually led to the revolution.

The Roman Catholic Church was an important factor in the life of the Mexican. It had become financially one of the most powerful forces in Mexico. It owned real-estate and held mortgages on much other property.

The Ley Lerdo de Tejada, drafted by Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, was passed in 1856. It forbade religious corporations from holding real-estate not used for religious or charitable purposes. The law was not confiscatory since the proceeds were

to be turned back to the Church. Most of the lands were purchased by the landed aristocracy that already owned a good portion of the country. The Indian was too poor to purchase land that he desperately needed. Instead of alleviating the long-fomenting agrarian problem, the Ley Lerdo de Tejada only complicated matters by making it possible for the upper class to achieve a stronger hold on the downtrodden Indian and mestizo population. While these landless people suffered indescribable hardship from the three colonial institutions, most presidents sought power to satisfy their own greed.

The Mexicans have for years, since the conquest by Hernán Cortés in 1519, been tormented under numerous leaders and experienced inhuman oppression. Instead of receiving land, according to 'century-old' agrarian reform promises, the Indian mass was stripped of it and found itself without means of earning a decent living.

The Indian population was discontented with the ruthless leadership of Porfirio Díaz who held an iron grip on the people and on the presidential office for the thirty-five years between 1875 and 1910. The masses wanted land, freedom from the Church, and freedom from the foreign enterprises which were welcomed by Díaz. They were exploited also by the caciques who manipulated justice, the educational system, and the distribution of land.

Although the country seemed to be progressing rapidly under the Díaz regime, in reality only a few were

benefiting. There were two classes - the few rich and the many poor which resulted in national duality. Roberto Ugalde portrays rather vividly this state of affairs:

La (clase) de arriba estaba formada por extranjeros venidos de Estados Unidos y de diversos países europeos y por una opulenta aristocracia nacional. La de abajo, como siempre numerosísima, estaba formada por los hombres modestos de México, nacidos en su propia tierra, al rayo del sol nacional.¹

Díaz took measures to enforce the Reform Laws against the villages. He favoured the aristocracy, government officials, and foreign investors but kept the masses at bay by rude force. Speaking of Porfirio Díaz, Stanley R. Ross writes:

When the inhabitants of the fertile Valley of Papantla in the state of Veracruz resisted the survey of their lands during the winter of 1890, the government responded with a full-scale invasion of the men, women, and children of the valley.²

On the basis of this episode and multiplied by countless others, Crow used rather weak language when he stated

¹Roberto Ugalde, "Dualidad nacional," Excelsior (México, D. F.), 15 de febrero de 1965, p. 8, primera parte.

²Stanley R. Ross, Francisco I. Madero, Apostle of Mexican Democracy, Columbia University Press, New York, 1955, p. 30.

that, "... most of the ejido lands slipped out of the hands of the Indians...."³ Similar atrocities swept the underprivileged masses from one corner of the country to the other, leaving few, if any, untouched by the ruling hand of Díaz.

The exploited Indian had no recourse except to voice his inhuman suffering, which led to the unforgettable moment in the history of Mexico - 1910 - the year of the revolution. The agrarian problem was such that the Revolution was inevitable.

The Revolution not only brought about drastic agrarian, social, and economic changes but also inspired many novels, dramas, music, and art. It made a strong impact on the novel and served as the main theme.

During Porfirio Díaz' dictatorship, toward the end of the nineteenth century, little was done to stimulate creative ability. The trend of literary themes of this transitory epoch was toward artificial and exotic topics. Influenced by the French and Spanish modernists, Mexican writers veered away from the nationalistic type novels. Instead of stressing local topics and writing about their own country and people, the novelists either imitated the Europeans or translated many of their works.

³John A. Crow, Mexico Today, Harper, New York, 1957, p. 137.

After the modernistic movement, the novels developed into another phase, that of realism. This realism was not based on foreign influence but rather on the abrupt political and social change that took place during the era of the Mexican Revolution. The novelists now diverted their attention to national politics, social problems, the Mexican countryside, but above all, to the Indian masses. They wrote profusely in the midst of action which demanded instant and spontaneous production and consequently literary forms and techniques were frequently disregarded. As for themes and material, situations and scenes did not have to be invented to produce effective, emotional climaxes. Life at this time was chaotic, filled with tragedy and sorrow.

The landless masses were promised land and justice but received a negligible amount of either. Dissatisfaction spread throughout the country since little or nothing was done for them. Consequently, waves of peons, bandits, and murderers swept the villages and countryside, destroying life and private property. This was recorded firsthand by the novelists.

Realism was the strong element in the novels of the twentieth century. The novelists based their themes on what they experienced and observed and wrote about the daily life of the Indian masses. The novels, in effect, reflected the social reality of this particular epoch of Mexico. Literature made possible the exposition of the suffering,

exploitation, and suppression of human dignity which were unique to lower class people of Mexico.

From this period emerged Mariano Azuela who is considered one of the foremost literary figures Mexico has ever known. He was deeply concerned about the social conditions of the country. His novels were not written for entertainment purposes but to denounce the social system, the poverty, and exploitation of the Indian by the cacique. In the epic Mexican Revolutionary novel, Los de abajo, as well as in many of his other novels, Azuela relates about the brutal treatment and misery of the Indian.

As the post-revolutionary novels were developed, they acquired new perspectives. One point of departure from the novels of the actual revolution was the novela indianista. It is only natural that, since this period of Mexican history deals primarily with the suffering Indian masses, the Indian becomes the protagonist of numerous novels. Heretofore, his role in Mexican literature was relatively insignificant. Though he had a minor role in the literature of the nineteenth century, he later became the main theme of Mexican letters.⁴

The innovator of this new Mexican genre was Gregorio López y Fuentes. In his classic El indio (1936), he

⁴Irving A. Leonard, John T. Reid, John A. Crow, John E. Englekirk, An Outline History of Spanish American Literature, Third Edition, Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York, 1965, p. 136.

dramatically describes the life, traditions, and philosophy of a typical suffering Indian of a typical Indian community.

Since 1940, the trend has been toward universal themes which include love, life, and death. Although the novels become more psychological and philosophical in nature, much of the action centers around some aspect of the Revolution.

In Al filo del agua (1947), for instance, Agustín Yáñez gives a detailed account of the social and political conditions prevailing in pre-revolutionary rural Mexico but he also includes the interaction of sex and religion. In La escondida (1948), Miguel N. Lira deals with a story that unfolds in a revolutionary atmosphere. It is a novel of love and passion as well as the historical, social, and psychological aspects of the Revolution.

Although the contemporary Mexican novelists concern themselves with universal themes, many works are based on the social and political changes that have or have not taken place since the Revolution.

Under question is the merit of the bloody period of Mexico. Has the lot of the Indian improved since then?

Crow states that,

The Revolution of 1910 marked the turning point in the social and cultural history of Mexico. By giving the Indian land and liberty, the Revolution

gave him dignity as a human being and revitalized his long-dormant cultural creativity.⁵

We have only to read completely reliable data on the history of Mexico to conclude that Crow's statement is, in part, a fallacy. True, the Revolution was a turning point in Mexican history, the Indians and mestizos finally did receive land redistributed by the government, and they did gain liberty. But all one has to do is travel throughout Mexico, even this very day, and see that the majority of the Indian and mestizo population is far from 'having dignity as a human being' not only in the pueblecitos but in the metropolitan area of Mexico City and other major cities as well.

To further substantiate this, Oscar Lewis⁶ explains in detail the present socio-economic conditions of Mexico in Pedro Martínez, The Children of Sánchez, and Five Families. These three texts, published in 1963, are based on his Mexican case studies in the culture of poverty during a fifteen-year period. The Martínez family is one of five families that is not only included in the last book mentioned but also studied in depth in Pedro Martínez. Lewis studied aspects of their material culture, economic life, etc. by living with them, interviewing them, and making extended

⁵Crow, Mexico Today, p. 154.

⁶Oscar Lewis, Five Families, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1963.

observations of every phase of their life. He further states that, after the Revolution, "... some fortunate peasants received ejido land reclaimed from the haciendas. Indebtedness and acute poverty were lessened ... and there was more personal freedom."⁷ But he also found out that,

... for Pedro (Martínez) the Revolution was a failure. He believed that he did not live much better than he had under the pre-revolutionary government of Porfirio Díaz. High prices and the increasing need for cash made life difficult. "What good is it to have freedom if we don't have enough to eat? Before it was the hacienda owners who exploited us, now it's the government and the bankers. It's all the same."⁸

The reader of contemporary Mexican literature will realize that the problems that existed in Mexico, in the past, exist today. The problems of racial prejudice, education of the masses, and poverty of the preponderant numbers of Mexican people, though somewhat alleviated, have not been completely eradicated. Times have changed but conditions, as reflected in literary themes, remain the same.

⁷Lewis, Five Families, p. 31.

⁸Ibid., pp. 31-32

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY AND WORKS OF MAGDALENA MONGRAGON AGUIRRE

Magdalena Mondragón Aguirre was born in Torreón, in the State of Coahuila, México, on the fourteenth of July, 1913. At nine years of age she displayed her talent as a writer, winning her first prize in school with literary compositions. This talent she cultivated through the years and ultimately achieved the distinction of being the first woman in Mexico to become an editor of a daily newspaper, La Prensa Gráfica.

She was only fourteen years old when, under the guidance of Antonio de Juambelz,¹ she embarked on her journalistic career with the newspaper El Siglo de Torreón whose circulation covers a number of provinces in the northern part of Mexico. While Magdalena Mondragón was pursuing her career as a novice journalist, she also was studying a business course. She apparently adhered to her father's suggestion who believed that it would be a precautionary measure against starvation. In her own words she states, "... ya que mi padre pensaba que los artistas nos morimos

¹General Editor of El Siglo de Torreón.



MAGDALENA MONDRAGÓN AGUIRRE

de hambre."² Fortunately, by utilizing her diversified literary talents, she became an outstanding success in the world of letters.

At this early age she already knew which path in life to follow in order to realize her ambition. The ambition was a desire to acquaint herself with the social problems of her time. She entered the field of journalism because she thought that from the strategic position as a journalist she would have a better vantage point to observe and study in detail the complexities of political, economic, and above all, social problems.³ To her it was more than a career and it certainly was more than seeking financial gain. It was a means to an end.

It is quite evident that the problems in which she takes profound interest are the problems of the deprived class of the Mexican nation. This is the segment of the population that is close to her and that is emphasized in most of her works.

The concern for the welfare of the lower classes, the individuals, and masses of destitute people and her interest in the human element is everpresent throughout her novels. Representative examples of these novels are Puede que'l otro año ... Novela de La Laguna (1938), Norte bárbaro (1944), Yo, como pobre (1945), and Más allá existe la tierra

²Personal correspondence, December, 1964.

³Personal correspondence, December, 1964.

(1947). The human element is brought out vividly and realistically, not in documentary fashion nor with the inclusion of statistics but with a penetrating insight into the suffering and anguish of the 'have-nots'. "Ha sabido, además," según la crítica de Manuel Pedro González, "encontrar su procedimiento guiada por su profunda sinceridad y por su simpatía hacia los menesterosos."⁴

The feeling of compassion toward the indigent was virtually inherited from her father, Adolfo Mondragón Bouckhart, a surgeon. From him, her grandfather, and other members of her family she learned the principles of justice and of kindness toward the downtrodden society. Her grandfather was rather discreet in offering financial aid to the poor. She relates that he would place a large cup containing money on a table near the door. The poor would come and help themselves to the desired amount of money, "... para que la gente no sintiera la humillación de pedir."⁵ The amazing thing is that the people never failed to return what they borrowed.

Following the traditions of the family, her father also was an extraordinary crusader for the poor and dispossessed. His benevolence was expressed in a more formal way, through education. He founded the first hospital and

⁴Manuel Pedro González, Trayectoria de la novela en México, Ediciones Botas, México, D. F., 1951, p. 351.

⁵Magdalena Mondragón, Saludo a la vida, Asociación Mexicana de Periodistas, México, D. F., 1960, p. 56.

nurses training school, the first of its kind in northern Mexico. Through the generosity of Dr. Mondragón, hundreds of girls received free training. Later, he established social security for the needy.⁶

The attitude that her father and grandfather took toward the poor made an indelible impact on Magdalena Mondragón. She developed not only a sense of moral obligation to sympathize with the needy, but also expressed her love for them. She emphatically confirms this by the following words, "... el trabajo social nunca ha sido visto de mi parte con indiferencia, sino antes bien, con gran amor; ..."⁷ While her father and grandfather played their respective and unique roles in social welfare, Magdalena Mondragón chose the power of the word, by writing about the poor and in their behalf.

Since her employment as a reporter with El Siglo de Torreón in 1927, she has worked in every phase of journalism. Her articles appeared in at least six of the principle newspapers of Mexico, namely: El Mundo, El Dictamen, El Informador, El Diario de Yucatán, and El Porvenir. Interested in politics, she contributed her political commentaries to Todo and many other magazines, and newspapers. Her literary articles appeared in Revista de Revistas, Estampa, and Todo.

⁶Magdalena Mondragón, Saludo a la vida, p. 56.

⁷Ibid., p. 56.

She also published a Boletín Cultural about which no information could be obtained.

She arrived in Mexico City in 1942 and continued her journalistic career by becoming associated with La Prensa. Although she retired several years ago she occasionally writes articles for this newspaper. Thoroughly acquainted with the newspaper field, her news coverage encompassed a variety of subjects, such as, politics, police, etc. She has proven to be a capable newspaperwoman to the extent that her name is listed in the Enciclopedia Uthea as a journalist. After some thirty years, she decided that she had acquired sufficient material which would enable her to dedicate herself exclusively to writing.⁸

As a prolific writer, Magdalena Mondragón did not, and to the present day does not, limit her literary ability to journalism. She is considered by many critics of reknown as one of the outstanding women writers of this century who has cultivated the novel in Mexico.⁹ Through her literary genius she has become one of the more prominent novelists of Mexico. This, indeed, is a great honor, especially when we consider that, not only in Mexico but throughout Latin America, it was difficult to find women who had sought and

⁸Personal correspondence, December, 1964.

⁹John S. Brushwood and José Rojas Garcidueñas, Breve historia de la novela mexicana, Vol. 9, Manuales Studium, México, D. F., 1959, p. 124.

achieved success in literature before the early twentieth century.

Magdalena Mondragón was twenty-four years old when her first novel, Puede que'l otro año ... Novela de la Laguna, was published in 1937 and was awarded a prize by the Ateneo Mexicano de Mujeres. With this novel she began her denunciation of social injustices perpetrated by the hacendados of La Laguna, a cotton-growing area in the northern part of Mexico.

The second novel was Norte bárbaro, August 4, 1944, which was the first book published in La Paz, Territorio Sur de Baja California, under the auspices of Marcos T. Lara.

In 1945, Magdalena Mondragón published Yo, como pobre which brings into focus the miserable life of the poor working class who has no other recourse than that of living in Mexico City's dump area, La Morena. Mildred Adams sums it up by saying, "... the young writer wrings the full measure of popular ideological pathos out of her workers by making them the symbol of the Mexican poor."¹⁰ This novel, translated into English in 1947 by Samuel Putnam under the title Someday the Dream, has the distinction of having been selected the book of the month by the Club del Libro Americano in New York City. Such an honor had never before been given a Mexican writer.

¹⁰Mildred Adams, "Human Flotsam," New York Times Book Review, March 23, 1947 (part VII), p. 18:4.

An excellent four-column review of Someday the Dream was made by Bertram D. Wolfe, noted critic and analyst. Unfortunately, the well-written article begins with this partially erroneous statement: "This first novel by Magdalena Mondragón is at once the most unusual and the most Mexican of Mexican novels."¹¹ After having read either the original Spanish copy or the English version, any Mexican or anyone who understands Mexico will agree that Yo, como pobre is both 'the most unusual and the most Mexican of novels' but it is by no means Magdalena Mondragón's first, since it was preceded in publication by the two aforementioned novels, namely, Puede que'l otro año (1937) and Norte bárbaro (1944).

Wolfe's article was accompanied by a large drawing by José Guadalupe Posada from "Monografía" and depicts three partially clad skeletons furiously sweeping a street while a fourth, presumably the boss, looks on. (A reproduction of this drawing is found on the following page.)

In 1950, Magdalena Mondragón published El día no llega which is very different from all her other novels. It is a psychological and philosophical novel in which fantasy plays a major role. She utilizes a completely new technique in this novela de evasión.¹²

¹¹Bertram D. Wolfe, "The Most Mexican of Mexican Stories," New York Herald-Tribune Weekly Book Review, (March 16, 1947), p. 5.

¹²In "Las letras mexicanas de 1947 a 1952," México en el mundo de hoy, Editorial Guaranía, México, D. F., 1952, p.

The Most Mexican of Mexican Stories



A drawing by Jose Guadalupe Posada from "Monografia"

This drawing appeared in the New York Herald-Tribune Weekly Book Review on March 16, 1947. It accompanied Bertram D. Wolfe's review of Someday the Dream, Samuel Putnam's translation of Yo, como pobre.

One of Mexico City's leading newspapers, El Nacional, established the Premio Anual Permanente de Novela in 1951. The purpose of this Concurso Anual de Novela is to promote the development of literature and to stimulate interest in the authors. Magdalena Mondragón won national acclaim when she was awarded the Premio Nacional de Literatura in 1954 for her novel, Tenemos sed. The prologue of this novel includes the following words of praise by El Nacional: "Su ejecutoria en el campo literario es motivo de invariables y justos elogios."

To this day, April, 1965, she has written nine novels, of which two are unpublished, ¡Qué crezcan los hombres! and Uno muere una vez. ¡Qué crezcan los hombres! deals with the present colonization of the rich and poor zones of Campeche, Yucatán, and Quintana Roo.¹³ The only data available concerning Uno muere una vez was found in the foreword of Dos obras de teatro, a booklet published by Colección México, Grupo América, which contains two plays, La sirena que llevaba el mar and El mundo perdido. Speaking about Uno muere una vez, the writer says, "Magdalena ... plantea problemas sutiles y complicadísimos, pero sin apartarse jamás -como es su norma-

451, Gilberto González y Contreras states: El día no llega, única novela de Magdalena Mondragón en que se escapa de los dominios del realismo social, es lo más importante de su género, siendo novela en cuyos meandros la realidad se mezcla intimamente con el sueño.

¹³Personal telephone conversation, April 21, 1965.

de la vida;"¹⁴

Her most recent novel, Habla un espía (1961), was published in paperback under the pseudonym of Vera Seminoreff by the Editora de Periódicos, La Prensa. Completely unlike all novels by Magdalena Mondragón, Habla un espía is written in documentary style. It is based on true facts of the confessions of a spy.¹⁵ In it, the author describes in detail all the operational intricacies and organizational functions of espionage rings and the hazards encountered by their members. In the prologue, Magdalena Mondragón tells that the reason for writing this novel is:

... para que se conozcan los horrores de la guerra y se propugne la alegría y seguridad de la paz.

Pienso en el paraíso de un mundo sin armas, en que todos los hombres se consideren hermanos.¹⁶

She also published one essay, Los presidentes dan risa (1948), which was nearly completely condemned and burned during the presidency of Lic. Miguel Alemán. In the prologue, Magdalena Mondragón tells us:

¹⁴Magdalena Mondragón, Dos obras de teatro, Colección México (Grupo America), México, D. F., 1961.

¹⁵Personal telephone conversation, April 21, 1965.

¹⁶Vera Seminoreff, Habla un espía, Editora de Periódicos, La Prensa, México, D. F., 1961.

Este libro no tiene pretensiones históricas, únicamente constituye el trabajo de una reportera que ha querido reunir, en un pequeño volumen, algo de la parte burlona de México sobre su política.¹⁷

In her inimitable way, she mocks the presidents of Mexico, using delightful and colourful but piercing descriptions of their character, physical attributes, and above all, she criticizes the manner in which they abused the office of the presidency. Magdalena Mondragón includes the following lyric which was composed by the people to describe how Plutarco Elías Calles had his enemies disposed of. It also gives a brief but overall picture of conditions in Mexico during his presidency from 1924 to 1934:

El pobre y el rico son dos personas,
 el ciudadano paga por los dos;
 el trabajador suda por los tres;
 el soldado defiende a los cuatro;
 el vago (líder), come de los cinco;
 el usurero desnuda a los seis;
 el abogado encuera a los siete;
 el cantinero envenena a los ocho;
 el confesor condena a los nueve;
 el médico mata a los diez;
 el agrarista roba a los once;
 el comerciante explota a los doce;
 el sepulturero entierra a los trece;
 el diablo carga con los catorce;
 y Plutarco acaba con los quince.¹⁸

¹⁷Magdalena Mondragón, Los presidentes dan risa, México, D. F., 1948, p. 12.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 130.

Magdalena Mondragón also wrote two short stories, Y me comí a la muerte and El inútil sentimiento, but no information is available on them.

Gilberto González y Contreras said that the theatre in Mexico is the hermano menor of the novel and of poetry.¹⁹ Magdalena Mondragón made her 'little brother' debut with what turned out to be an outstandingly successful play, Cuando Eva se vuelve Adán (1938), an alta comedia of three acts. After its presentation in the Teatro Ideal on May 14, 1938, Antonio de María y Campos wrote, "Magdalena Mondragón llega al teatro por la puerta grande de los éxitos sin recomendación, y con su primera obra ... empieza donde otros acaban o acabarán."²⁰ So well received and acclaimed was this play that theatrical critics have considered it the best stage play of 1938.

The success of Cuando Eva se vuelve Adán reached such heights that it was sold to the moving picture industry. In 1950 it was staged in the Community Center Theatre in New York City by the Grupo Futurismo under the direction of Rolando Barrera.

Another play by Magdalena Mondragón, No debemos morir, was published in 1944 by Editorial Moderna of León, Guanajuato. This four-act play is political in nature.

¹⁹González y Contreras, México en el mundo de hoy, p. 473.

²⁰Magdalena Mondragón, Cuando Eva se vuelve Adán, Biblioteca Enciclopédica Popular (Secretaría de Educación Pública), tomo 186, México, D. F., 1947, p. 5.

La sirena que llevaba el mar (1945) is another of her successful plays. It was presented on stage on November 22, 1950, in the Teatro de Bellas Artes and directed by Xavier Rojas. The principal roles of Nereida and José were done by María Morales and Antonio Longoria, members of an experimental group at Bellas Artes. This play was subsequently presented in the Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas of Mexico City on January 28, 1951. The guest director was the poet Francisco Serrano Méndez. The background music, entitled Sirenas, was taken from Debussy's, Nocturnos. Magaña Esquivel said of this play in El Nacional, "Obra de gran belleza, obra esencialmente poética." The Teatro Fábregas was inaugurated in January, 1951 by the presentation of this play. La sirena que llevaba el mar was heard by the radio audience and seen often on television. It was translated into English by Magdalena Mondragón's personal friend, Isabel Gibson Ziegler.²¹

Unfortunately, not all of Mondragón's plays were successful. The Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas presented Tarántula in 1942 which resulted in a catastrophe. Five years later the same play, under the title of Torbellino, was published along with Cuando Eva se vuelve Adán by the Ediciones Populares de la Secretaría de Educación Pública. In 1950, Torbellino was presented in the Teatro Principal

²¹Author of The Nine Days of Father Sierra (1951) which was made into a movie, Las ciudades de oro.

de Puebla and achieved public acclaim. The play's third presentation, in the Teatro Arbeau, was not as well received.

Her latest play, El choque de los justos, was published in April, 1964. Its three acts consist of three cuadros each. The play deals with justice and racial discrimination between two tribal groups, the Yori and the Yaqui.

The list of plays by Magdalena Mondragón also includes Un barco en el mar and Se alquila cuarto about which no information could be obtained.

Magdalena Mondragón added Saludo a la vida to her works, which is of a completely different genre from her other books. It is an illustrated chronicle published in 1960 and includes a detailed account of experiences based on her three-and-a-half month trip around the world. In this chronicle, she wrote about the politics, social conditions, culture, art, and customs of the various countries she visited.

She left Mexico City on the seventeenth of September, 1957, and returned during the first week of December, 1957. Her itinerary included New York City, Italy, Egypt, Japan, Greece, Israel, India, Hawaii, and Los Angeles. While in Beirut, she met another well-known contemporary Mexican author, Rodolfo Usigli.

Many of her journalist friends visited Germany, Russia, United States, Canada, and other countries.

Magdalena Mondragón, desiring to visit places unseen by most of her colleagues, states,

... pero yo preferí el medio y el lejano Oriente, no visitado antes por otros reporteros ni muchos escritores mexicanos y que, sin embargo, constituye para nosotros una experiencia, un enfoque realístico de la política que nos atañe por varios conceptos.²²

While in Los Angeles, she renewed her acquaintance with Isabel Ziegler and Joseph Laitin.²³ At his request, she lectured to a number of Los Angeles university groups. He also extended to her an invitation to speak to his class, to which she responded,

... dándome la sorpresa de mi vida, ya que organizó 'sobre la marcha' una conferencia con los jóvenes alumnos, durante la cual éstos hicieron todas las preguntas que les interesaban sobre el Medio y el Lejano Oriente y los países que visité.²⁴

She was greatly impressed by the wonders of the world. Although, when she returned to Mexico City, she said the following words that express her love for her own country, "¡México a la vista era para mis ojos el mejor panorama del mundo!"²⁵

²²Magdalena Mondragón, Saludo a la vida, p. 29.

²³Professor of modern history in the Art Center School of Los Angeles.

²⁴Magdalena Mondragón, Saludo a la vida, p. 316.

²⁵Ibid., p. 318.

In February, 1965, in Pátzcuaro, México, she finished writing her final draft of the biography of her personal friend, General Francisco J. Múgica.²⁶ The biography is written against the setting of the pre-revolution period and continues to the present day. Magdalena Mondragón plans to have this book published in the near future.

To complement her diversified literary works, she has written a number of poems. Souvenir, a collection of poems, was published in 1938 by friends of the author. Mar, Vertical, and Para tí, que no te has muerto were written in 1939. Unfortunately, no copies of these poems could be found.

Her most recent booklet of poetry, Si mis alas nacieran,²⁷ was published in 1960. It contains twelve poems which give an excellent example of how she expresses the profundity of her thoughts and emotions, using well-chosen vocabulary. The predominant theme throughout these poems is love, life, hope, despair, and death. The tone of some poems is gay, light, and colorful, while in others it is heavy and lugubrious. Part of one of the poems, Canto de amor, is included in her novel El día no llega, on pages 20-22.

²⁶General Múgica was the governor of the State of Baja California Sur in 1940 where, in the same year, Magdalena Mondragón's novel, Norte bárbaro, was published. He was one of at least thirty-six candidates for the presidency of the Mexican Republic in 1940. He was also governor of the State of Michoacán, and in 1948 the Secretario de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas.

²⁷Magdalena Mondragón, Si mis alas nacieran, Impresora Alfredo del Bosque, México, D. F., 1960.

During her trip around the world in 1957, Magdalena Mondragón was awed by the immensity and beauty of Taj Mahal in Agra, India. This inspired her to write the following poem which is included in Saludo a la vida:

Mi suspiro nostálgico se prende
a tus aristas para darte el beso
que el viento lleva como luz que enciende
todo mi ensueño de tu encanto preso.

Bordan las horas tu sudario ignoto
como espuma de mar petrificada;
y mi desierto es nueva flor de loto,
lágrima viva en emoción guardada.

¡Ay, Taj Mahal, oasis en la duna!
Desafías a la muerte cual ninguna
vida lo hiciera con amores plena;
y resurges del polvo en la ceniza:
Ave Fénix que blanca se desliza
como en un cielo oscuro, luna llena. (pp. 220-221)

She states that words do not exist that can express the beauty of this gigantic monument, "Mi pobre poema es poco para la belleza del Taj Mahal, que sobrepasa en armonía todo lo que de él se ha escrito."²⁸

Far from exhausting her enthusiasm, energy, and time in the production of novels, plays, etc., Magdalena Mondragón organized and directed the eleven-day Primera Jornada Cultural Coahuilense as a tribute to her patria chica, the State of Coahuila.

²⁸Magdalena Mondragón, Saludo a la vida, p. 221.

La labor indiscutible e imponderable de Magdalena Mondragón nuevamente se hace visible, tangible y plena de vigor en este acontecimiento que vive el pueblo mexicano a través de la Primera Jornada Cultural Coahuilense.²⁹

During this festival, which took place in early 1958, outstanding men and women of Coahuila featured the cultural aspects of their State. Included in the successful program were the recitation of poetry, painting and caricature exhibitions, songs of this State, etc.

On February 27, 1965, she left for an extensive tour of Latin America and returned to Mexico City during the first week of April. Her itinerary included Uruguay, Chile, Argentina, Peru, and Panama. Her trip was highlighted by the pre-Lenten Carnival in Rio de Janeiro and a visit to Brazil's new capital, Brasilia. She also visited Cuzco and Machu Picchu, the ruins of the Inca Empire. She expressed her deep interest in these historical sights.

At present, Magdalena Mondragón resides in Mexico City where she is a member of La Asociación de Escritores de México. She makes frequent trips to Tampico in the State of Tamaulipas where she owns a cotton ranch and occupies the presidency of La Colonia Agrícola de El Periodista.

²⁹J. C. Gamas Marín, "Jornada cultural coahuilense," El Nacional, México, D. F., el 23 de junio de 1958, p. 6.

CHAPTER III

MAGDALENA MONDRAGON'S NOVELS OF SOCIAL PROTEST

In most of her novels, Magdalena Mondragón presents to her readers a clear picture of the social conditions of post-revolutionary Mexico. Her novelas de denuncia are detailed expositions of the life and problems of the rural lower class. Time after time she reveals the hardships suffered by this segment of Mexico which constitutes the greater part of the population. In her novels of protest we see how the unfortunate mestizo becomes the product of his environment. Regardless of the effort he exerts to improve his lot, he is constantly thrown back to the point from which he started, either through his own ignorance, cowardice, and complacency, or as a result of governmental maneuverings on all levels.

In the first chapter we have seen how the manipulations of the three colonial institutions repeatedly deprived the mestizo of an opportunity to progress and to assume the role of a responsible member of the population. These are only some of the issues which Magdalena Mondragón emphasizes in her novels. In them she illustrates the reasons why the people of the lower-class assume their attitudes toward life as they live it. Through her novels we

can better understand why the majority of the people live the way they do, even to this day. Compared to a number of her contemporaries, Magdalena Mondragón knows better the true reality of the Mexican society, the authentic Mexican life, the life of the vast dispossessed masses.¹

The reality of the lower Mexican society is that of a struggle for meager existence. A struggle that never ceases, due to the obstacles set up by their own ignorance, by their philosophy of life, by the obstinacy of their government, and the blasé upper-class of society. There is little, if any, feeling of compassion in the members of the aristocracy and government toward those of the lower classes. The absence of brotherly love, for the most part, is the cause of the hopeless plight of the masses.

Although she is familiar with the life of the poor and sympathizes with them, she does not offer any clearly-defined, workable solution to their problems. In some instances she does have her characters succeed in progressing somewhat, but soon this progress is obliterated by tragedy, either by the person's inability to cope with a situation or by the influence of outside forces.

Many of these salient points will be discussed in this chapter which consists of the analysis of three social

¹Manuel Pedro González, Trayectoria de la novela en México, Ediciones Botas, México, D. F., 1951, p. 351.

protest novels: Puede que'l otro año ... Novela de la Laguna (1937), Yo, como pobre (1944), and Más allá existe la tierra (1947).

PUEDE QUE'L OTRO AÑO ... NOVELA DE LA LAGUNA

In Puede que'l otro año, published in 1937, Magdalena Mondragón relates the problems of the people of La Laguna, a cotton-growing area composed of the northern Mexican states of Durango and Coahuila. She was born and lived in the heart of this region and is familiar with the daily life of its inhabitants. Puede que'l otro año is her account of their struggle for survival which is dependent on the failure or success of the cotton crop. The struggle against the elements of nature is further compounded by their powerless and helpless position under the might of the merciless hacendados.

The protagonist of Puede que'l otro año is Eustaquia, who manages a cotton-ranch near Torreón. She assumes all responsibility of the ranch and workers after her well-to-do husband, Eduardo, is taken prisoner by Villa forces. Eduardo is shot when Eustaquia is unable to raise the full amount of ransom required for his release. Her responsibilities are augmented by the death of her sister, Elvira, which orphans two children, Manfredo and Elvira.

Wanting to furnish her workers with adequate medical services, she sends Manfredo to Mexico City to study medicine.

Upon completing his studies, he returns to the ranch. Having compassion and love for her workers, she insists that he help her build a hospital for them and a school for their children. In this way, Eustaquia's lifelong dream becomes reality.

Meanwhile, Manfredo is confronted with a crucial problem that is resolved tragically. The love Elvira has for him as a brother surpasses the normal limits. She admits her feelings to him not only with words but with caresses as well. Stupified, he rejects her advances. Infuriated by his negative response, she threatens to fabricate the story of their love affair and inform the people of the village that he seduced her. Eustaquia appears and Elvira, lying to her aunt, boasts lewdly about her affair with Manfredo. She emphatically states that Manfredo will take her away with him thus preventing Eustaquia from fulfilling her dreams. During this traumatic scene, Eustaquia kills Elvira to protect Manfredo's reputation and innocence, and her project. She orders Manfredo to take her to the judge who commits her to prison for her bizarre crime.

The action of Puede que'l otro año centers completely around Eustaquia who portrays the courageous, pioneer-type person. Like the hacendados, she rules with an iron hand. But unlike the stereotyped hacendados, she reigns with compassion, endeavouring to help her campesinos improve their living and working conditions, education, and medical care.

There is relatively little dissatisfaction among her workers as compared to the workers of other ranches.

The inhuman treatment of the campesinos by the hacendados is vehemently attacked by Magdalena Mondragón:

(Los hacendados) ... no vacilaban en dar miles y miles de pesos a estos hombres impíos, para arreglar sus conflictos, y sin embargo, les dolía el corazón dar todas estas cantidades a sus campesinos en forma de mejoría para su salud y su vida; en forma de hogares, que bien pudieran haberse construido contratando los servicios de alguna de las compañías de cemento y haber pagado estas casas en el plazo de cinco años; pero la avaricia podía más que la razón, y los peones seguían desnudos, escuetos, tristes.. pidiendo justicia. (pp. 82-83)

Referring to Magdalena Mondragón's viewpoints, Eutiquio Aragonés writes the following commentary in the prologue:

... Magdalena Mondragón es un verdadero caso de mujer iluminada que comienza a discernir con calor y nervio humanos lo más profundo del alma popular. Respirando las penas de su pueblo aprendió a conocer las injusticias que con él cometen sus falsos apóstoles, sus egoístas directores, a los cuales hay que enjuiciar siempre con mucha más severidad que a los negociantes y patronos extranjeros, contra los que también alza su grito en un gesto de ansia reivindicativa. (p. 8)

Eustaquia, on the other hand, offers to her employees all her material possessions and love, thus becomes their champion:

- En cuanto a ustedes - exclamó dirigiéndose a los campesinos - como yo ya estoy vieja, dentro de un mes les cederé la hacienda, con todo y la escuela agrícola necesaria para que instruyan no solo ustedes, sino también sus hijos. (p. 100)

Her benevolence serves a dual purpose. First, and foremost, this is one of many ways she expresses her love for the peons and an unquestionable interest in their welfare. She treats them as if they were her own children. "... He visto en cada uno de estos seres, un hijo. un hijo mío, ..." (p. 117) Secondly, it decreases the possibilities of the workers organizing a syndicate for their own protection.

When any crisis arises among the peons, they could assuredly depend on the unflinching leadership and assistance of Eustaquia. For example, she boldly guides and organizes her armed peons to protect the precious water supply that rightfully belongs to her ranch.

While Eustaquia takes measures to help her workers, she does not intend to assume full financial responsibility.

... pienso que los campesinos deben cooperar cada uno con algo, para ayudar al sostenimiento de este sanatorio que les prestará servicios; y que en la hacienda se debe implantar una caja de ahorros. (pp. 104-105)

Here we see how Magdalena Mondragón has Eustaquia help the workers help themselves.

The scene in which Eustaquia murders Elvira not only creates dramatic effect but gives us deep insight into the character of Eustaquia. Realizing that the fulfillment of her project would be jeopardized by Elvira, Eustaquia resorts to eliminating her. To Eustaquia, the project has more value than life itself. Instead of being lured away from the ranch by Elvira, Manfredo now will remain in complete charge. Eustaquia informs him that she is justified in her actions and places faith in him:

No importa que me manden a presidio, mi obra ha sido justa, te he salvado y he salvado mi obra, tú continuarás aquí, ... tú continuarás, porque la vida que he creado, no puede detenerse; moriré yo, pero no morirá mi obra. (p. 114)

The villagers are appalled by the savage crime Eustaquia committed. They had held her in high esteem and considered her kind and beneficent. Because of this abrupt deviation from her normal behaviour pattern, her people are forced to believe that she has lost her mind. In these uninformed peasants insanity breeds fear. This fear causes them to reject Eustaquia.

The ironic moment of Puede que'l otro año occurs when the peons and the people of the village turn against Eustaquia after she kills her niece. By rejecting their benefactor, they reject the only hope for their future and the future of their children.

El pueblo olvidó todos los favores que debían a la mujer que supo ser compañera en sus penas; el pueblo olvidó los beneficios recibidos, y la mujer que gastó su juventud y su fuerza en un apostolado, a su paso no miro sino ojos que se cerraron con el deseo de no verla; ... (p. 115)

In spite of their attitude, Eustaquia, strong, idealistic, and understanding, is determined to have her plans carried out. By ordering Manfredo to continue their project, she shows her indomitable spirit in the face of adversity. Throughout the novel, particularly toward the end, she exhibits her singlemindedness of purpose by her total lack of concern for individuals, including herself.

In Puede que'l otro año, the peons speak the language which is representative of their social class level. Examples of the colloquial pronunciation throughout the novel are: "asté" for "usted", "jija" for "hija", "siñor" for "señor", "trair" for "traer", etc.

The title conveys the hope that the laguneros have for the future. For them, the present year may not have been prosperous but, perhaps, the next year would be better.

"Puede que 'lotro año..." Puede que 'lotro año llueva más. Puede que 'lotro año levantemos mejor cosecha. Puede que 'lotro año suba el precio del algodón...
 "Puede que 'lotro año..." ¡Mientras haya laguneros, siempre se tendrá a flor de labio esta frase, se jugará la vida entera en una albur a ganar o a perder, y se morirá de pie, pero luchando. (pp. 90-91)

In Puede que'l otro año, Magdalena Mondragón illustrates the adverse living and working conditions in which the peons endeavour to survive. They are condemned to the tragedy of today, impatient and apprehensive about tomorrow. Patterned after the social protest novels of Mariano Azuela, Magdalena Mondragón forcefully emphasizes the hacendados' disregard for the peon as a member of mankind. Some progress is made to alleviate the problems of this small segment of the algodoneros, but disaster intervenes and they again find themselves entangled in the web of despair.

YO, COMO POBRE

Yo, como pobre, published in 1944, is a novel which will both enthrall and repel the reader. Unlike most of Magdalena Mondragón's novels, it takes place in Mexico City. Most of the action occurs on a garbage dump named La Morena. This is a tale of poverty, misery and degradation suffered by man, caused by man; of the hopelessness of his situation, slightly lessened, at times, by a few ineffectual dreamers.

The protagonists are the Rodríguez family: Damián, the father; Julia, the mother; and their children, Augusto, Enriqueta and María, who live on the garbage heap called La Morena in the Colonia de Santa Julia in Mexico City.

They and their friends and neighbors eke out a living picking over the refuse from the metropolitan area, which is brought to the dump each morning. They scavenge for pieces of paper, metal, glass, rags, and "edible" food which they sell to buyers from the city.

Most of the families that live on La Morena remain there all their lives. Many of them dream of the day they will get away, but lack the education, initiative and strength to find another way of life; and poverty, like leprosy, was an irremediable evil, there was no use struggling against it. Damián Rodríguez was one of these dreamers. During the rainy season, when the dump is too wet to be worked, the men of La Morena work as street sweepers in Mexico City. Damián becomes ill while working there and dies.

After Damián's death, his son, Augusto, becomes head of the family. Like his father, he becomes interested in the labor union and in politics as a tool to better himself and to get justice for his people. He becomes disillusioned with the leadership of the union and the raw practices of politicians and threatens to expose them. For this, they have him killed. Julia remains at La Morena, waiting for release, through death; release from poverty, treachery and injustice, believing that her country and her people will progress--eventually.

In Yo, como pobre, as in many of Mondragón's works, the real strength lies in the woman of the family. Julia

Rodríguez was such a woman. She was good and wise and seemed content with her place in life. She made all the important decisions for her family and it was to her that her neighbors turned for advice and help. Julia organized the family work force, helped neighbors who were ill, taught the women and children how to repair their shacks during the rainy season to keep them dry inside, successfully defeated the chief salvager in a battle of words, when he tried to cheat the scavengers and went into the city to get the health authorities when La Morena had a diphtheria epidemic. She was a very religious woman who had a profound, if unusual, philosophy of life.

... la vida es un basurero; pero en la basura como en los pasteles de boda, también existen las moscas a millares. Y eso es la vida: pastel de novios y basura. Dulce y amarga, contradictoria y magnífica. Círculo cerrado por donde brincan los hombres como perritos amaestrados. (p. 34)

Damián Rodríguez was a simple soul, a child in many ways. He could become violently angry over trifles but his anger would dissipate in minutes. He was incapable of hatred. Like a child he could be deceived by the most stupid tales; to him, everything was new. When he and Julia were first married, he dreamed of taking her away from the dump but he couldn't bring himself to betray his ancestors by being ashamed of their humble calling. After a few years he came to realize that he would never have the strength to leave.

Al principio soñó en conquistar el mundo para ella; luego vió que una cosa son los sueños y otra muy diferente los obstáculos distintos que son naturales en la vida; y comprendió que aunque no le faltaba ambición, carecía de la fuerza indispensable para saltar esos obstáculos que a su debilidad le parecieron infranqueables. (pp. 45-46)

He complained often of their lot in life and counted on Julia to comfort him and give him strength. Damián loved to play at politics and was convinced of the need for a union. He was active in both the union and politics until his untimely death.

Augusto, the son of Damián and Julia, by adhering to the value systems of his family and his class, progressed little farther than did his father. He had a good education, obtained employment outside the dump and planned to move his family away from La Morena. But the values he held and his lack of responsibility were illustrated in the episode of the radio.

Augusto bought a Christmas gift for the Rodríguez family. They lived in abject poverty. His mother had no stove and he and his wife slept on the floor for want of a bed: but Augusto bought his family a radio. He bought it on the installment plan with the union taking the payments from his pay check each week. His house had no electricity so he stole the essential current by running a wire from the utility line to the house. He dared not leave the radio in the house when no one was at home, because of thieves, so he carried it

to a nearby inn and left it in the care of the proprietor until he returned. But, in spite of all these disadvantages, they were happy because they could now hear music whenever they so desired.

Augusto was ambitious, enthusiastic and idealistic. He tried to help himself and others but his methods were so rash and unwise that he lost, not only the means to help, but his life. So the cycle of the poor of Mexico is completed again, in spite of ambition, idealism, education and the desire to do good.

Yo, como pobre is an extremely complex novel. Embodied in the main story are at least four vignettes relating incidents of legal and moral significance. Running through both the main story and the vignettes is a description of the customs, folklore and mores of lower-class, urban, Mexican life. Added to these is a picture of the dishonesty and injustices which cut across class lines and seem to involve the majority of the people of Mexico. Picking up all these threads, Magdalena Mondragón weaves them into a powerful novel of social protest.

One of the stories within the main story of Yo, como pobre tells of Mariana, a young prostitute who eventually becomes the common-law wife of Augusto. Mariana was left alone while still a child. After a few years of living with one family or another and having to move on to escape the lust of men, she found herself, at the age of thirteen, at La Morena.

After she was attacked and raped she became a prostitute and spent some time in Morelos Hospital where she met many other victims of "la impunidad e irresponsibilidad masculina." Her pitiful condition was brought to Julia's attention and Julia invited her to live with them and do housework. She lived with them for several years, showing exemplary conduct and finally as Augusto's wife.

Another story within the story is the tale of a maid in Mexico City whom Damián, while working as a street sweeper, saw furtively disposing of an object in a garbage can. He investigated and learned that the object was the body of her dead infant, born that night and strangled by her hands. She told Damián her story of having deeply loved a man and having been betrayed by him. "La había defraudado en lo que es más para una mujer: en su fe, en su sexo." (p. 120) Her lover promised her everything until she became pregnant, then he disappeared. She carried the child and gave birth to it, alone in her room; but as she looked at the tiny boy:

Desde el fondo de sus entrañas la mujer sintió que la única forma de liberarse del hombre que la había defraudado eran matándolo y no habiéndolo podido hacer con el padre, lo hizo con la representación sexual más grande, más directa, más precisa que del hombre tenía: el hijo. (pp. 123-124)

Damián was revolted by this woman, this "garbage of the streets," but told no one of her story, not even Julia.

In these two vignettes, Magdalena Mondragón illustrates the unhappy role of Mexican women. She makes frequent reference to the irresponsible lavisciousness and lust of men; to the idea of betrayal and debasement of women. She offers a solution to the uncontrollable problem of prostitution in Mexico, in Mariana's story.

... no es predicando la moral, ni ocultando el rostro para no ver la podredumbre como ésta desaparece; tampoco lo podían evitar las explicaciones ni las excusas: solo un cambio total en la forma de gobierno, un cambio que removiera desde los cimientos de una nación hasta conmoverta transformando a las mujeres de bestias de placer en seres humanos libres de las diferentes clases del comercio del sexo, dignificando a éste en forma efectiva, podía terminar con la prostitución; por que entonces ésta no tendría razón de existir. (pp. 77-78)

As for the problem of unwanted pregnancies, the author relates that these people had no interest in matrimony and it made no difference to them if a woman had a child. The only thing that concerned a woman, herself, was the fulfilling of her destiny. However, she was also concerned about the economic means of support, knowing that men rarely assumed this responsibility, caring only for their pleasure.

The two other vignettes, much more brief, concern a group of beggars and a usurious moneylender. The beggars had a variety of wounds and losses, some real and some faked. They had regular stations in the city, returning to La Morena at night, and used many repulsive methods to gain money.

The moneylender at La Morena was Angélica. She lent money at an exorbitant rate of interest and acted as a "fence" for stolen articles. She had no weaknesses other than money.

It is significant that, though many of the people and episodes in Yo, como pobre would be considered illegal and/or immoral in our culture, the protagonists in this novel consider them to be normal, never report them to the authorities and may even indulge in the same practices.

One of the most important chapters in Yo, como pobre, which tells us so much about the Mexican's philosophy of life, tells us of his philosophy of death. According to Magdalena Mondragón, speaking through Padre José Benítez, death was a familiar companion to the lower-class Mexicans; they had come to look upon it as part of themselves. The people had:

... la sensibilidad voluptuosa que ofrece el pensamiento de la muerte y el sentimiento de ella; y que sólo de esta manera podían vivir, vivían sin duda alguna más profunda y ardientemente que pueblo alguno de la tierra. (p. 152)

During the diphtheria epidemic at La Morena, many children died. There was music, fireworks, and merriment on the dump as the people prepared for the burials. Death to these people was a friend, a lover and fully as important as life; they lived with it on a free and easy footing. The cult of death took varying forms in different parts of the

country, each had its own customs and rites pertaining to death.

After reflecting at length, Padre Benítez came to several conclusions. In the spring of the year, the entire city became an insane asylum with the lunatics let loose. There was an almost universal passion for dying and the suicide rate reached its peak. People, young and old, took their lives or the lives of others for almost any reason; a headache or the lack of a desired object could cause suicide or homicide. This passion for death, Padre Benítez explained.

... todas aquellas muertes en masa durante la primavera, aquel afán de matar y de matarse no significaban en realidad más que raíces ancestrales e indestructibles: sacrificios humanos degenerados. (pp. 151-152)

The priest understood that, though large numbers of children died, the parents took few preventative measures, not because they did not love the children but because they fatalistically accepted death as necessary. The weakest ones must die and go as messengers to win heaven for them all. The Mexican people were the one people in the world who had really learned how to die.

... en este sitio como en ninguna otra parte sentíase que ella (la muerte) era realmente la fuente de la vida y que el ser or no ser podía sobre estas bases adquirir sentido absoluto. (pp. 152-153)

Dishonesty, injustice and inequality seem to permeate into every corner of Mexico. Few escape exploitation; the poor and hopeless, exploited by all those above them, in turn betray their peers. As Julia expressed it, garbage exists everywhere; in hospitals, in politics, in business, in men and in women. Only the children remained on the edge of this filth. The problem of corruption in government could not change as long as people, as a form of silent protest against the absence of a democracy in their country, refrained from voting. According to Magdalena Mondragón, the only desire they had was to live in peace, hold on to their jobs and have enough to eat every day. During the national elections, the men of the dumps, primed with alcohol, were paid to vote as many times as they could in many different polling places.

En el fondo todo reía. La irónica verdad de que aquellos hombres serían utilizados para votar una, dos, tres veces, las que fueran necesarias para subsanar la indiferencia de la generalidad de los ciudadanos demasiado escépticos por lo que hace a las formas democráticas electorales de México; y la realidad absoluta de que eran los hombres de los basureros los que elegían a sus gobernantes, desde Presidente hasta diputados. (p. 287)

The tone of Yo, como pobre is somber and depressing. The people of La Morena realize that even if they did leave the dump it would only be to collect garbage somewhere else. But such is the human spirit that it nearly always nurtures

a spark of hope. This spark, this hope for the future is present in the last paragraph of the novel and serves as the title of the English translation by Samuel Putnam, Someday the Dream.

Algún día el sueño de los pobres, de los miserables, el sueño de los hombres de buena voluntad que moran sobre la tierra, se tornaría realidad. [p. 323]

MAS ALLA EXISTE LA TIERRA

"La (muerte) llevaban dentro desde que nacieron."¹

This one sentence, from Más allá existe la tierra, seems to sum up the plight of the poor of Mexico. In this moving and poignant novel, Magdalena Mondragón exposes to us brief, but penetrating glimpses into the lives of city workers, tenant farmers, sand miners, and others, and the hopelessness of their existence in present-day Mexican society. She portrays not only the problems of the poor, but the kinds of help they receive and the kinds of people that render it.

Simón Gutiérrez, the protagonist, loves the land and wants to see all of it. He joins forces with Margarito, a hunch-backed, former school-teacher and Rosa, a teacher.

¹Magdalena Mondragón, Más allá existe la tierra, Editorial Cortés, México, D. F., 1947, p. 174.

Margarito is in charge of a group of workers and their families who have lost their homes, have been sleeping in the streets and are now going out to build houses on unused land and claim it for their own.

Simón, Margarito and Rosa go from one colony to the other, in Mexico, trying to help dispossessed workers, Indians, sand miners, campesinos, braceros, and ejidatarios. While helping the less fortunate to improve their lives, Simón develops as great a love for humanity as he has for the land. He decides to pass on his love for both to his children and grandchildren; a love for land without frontiers and a love for people of every race and color. In this way he will live forever in the lives of his descendants.

There is symbolism in the title of this novel. In Más allá existe la tierra, for the lower classes of Mexico, 'la tierra' symbolizes freedom, justice and human dignity. These are hungry, degraded people to whom life and death have become merely words and upon whom injustices are perpetrated every day of the week. They have no recourse to officials and courts for honest assistance. Clashing with the power, greed and injustice of the government, landowners and the upper classes in general, in a daily struggle for mere subsistence, has made the Mexican poor apathetic and unwilling to try to improve their lot. Their attitude of living for today seems necessary when yesterday gained them nothing and tomorrow offers even less.

In the novel, as Simón grows to love Rosa, she becomes, to him, a symbol of the land. As he listens, with his ear to the ground, to the sounds of the earth, he says, "Sí, allí estaba: ¡la vida! ¡La vida como un niño moviéndose en el vientre de su madre!" (p. 5). He never intended to stay with Rosa, wanting always to go on and see more of the earth, but when she is carrying his child and he put his ear to her abdomen, "... escuchaba, como en otro tiempo sobre la tierra, el calor de la vida. Allí estaba, pero ahora más firme, en el vientre de la madre!" (p. 199). As he watches the birth of his son, he says to Rosa, "Tienes el mismo encanto de la tierra cuando rompen su corteza los tallos verdes ... ¡Toda tú eres la tierra!" (p. 112).

Simón Gutiérrez is looking for the meaning of life and expects to find it in the earth. At first, his interest in people is purely incidental to his travels. Gradually, as he becomes more and more involved with the people, they become his primary interest. He transfers his love for the abstract, inanimate land to concrete, animate human beings.

Más allá existe la tierra contains an excellent example of treating one aftermath of the Revolution in an elegant and interesting literary style. In it, Magdalena Mondragón cleverly illustrates the difficulties that the mestizos encounter after laws are passed by the government to distribute land. Though they are given land, the lack of

money prevents them from benefiting completely and, as a result, they have to place themselves at the mercy of the military.

Hace años, le dijo, el gobierno nos entregó la tierra para que la trabajáramos por nuestra cuenta; pero a pesar de los decretos presidenciales no hemos podido explotar realmente los terrenos debido a que, por falta de dinero para la compra de semilla y aperos de labranza, hemos tenido que emplearnos de por vida en las manos de los militares y principalmente del jefe de operaciones. (p. 147)

Technically, the mestizos, or Yaquis, are now land-owners, but by shrewd governmental tactics, they are considered members of the army to whom they owe their obedience.

Legalmente somos ejidatarios, pero de acuerdo con los arreglos que hace tiempo hicimos con el gobierno, para los jefes de operaciones somos soldados. Los yaquis siempre hemos sido guerreros; en el fondo jamás seremos otra cosa. Así, los militares explotan esta condición nuestra y la falta de aperos para siembra y han logrado apoderarse de las cosechas pagándolas a precios de hambre. Por el trabajo de un año obtenemos salario de peones, ningunas ganancias, acumulación de réditos y deudas. (p. 147)

So, since they are considered to be soldiers, not farmers, they dare not complain about their treatment or try to leave. If they do, they are accused of insubordination and shot.

One outstanding character trait of the campesinos in this novel, is their irresponsibility. Their whole

philosophy of life is brought out in one episode. A group of campesinos slaughtered a number of oxen belonging to the hacendados and prepared to have a fiesta. They invited the hacendados to share in the banquet. Their philosophy was:

Había que fiarse del destino; pero hoy era necesario, indispensable, urgente, bailar. Mañana; ¡quién sabe si todos iban a morir de hambre! ¡quién sabe si existirían y quién sabe si tuvieran otros bueyes para hacer barbacoa! Pero hoy, el hambre de muchos días se iba a calmar. (p. 175)

Another facet of this philosophy is reflected in their willingness to spend their last efforts and hard-earned money for a few moments of excitement; the excitement of fireworks and other frivolities, which to them were moments of beauty. "... Los sacrificios de trescientos sesenta y cinco días eran muy poco, no valían lo que unas horas de orgía de color, de luz, de alegría." (p. 95) Today was the day that mattered. Yesterday and yesterday's hunger was forgotten and they knew not what tomorrow would bring. This was their philosophy of life and this is what they practiced.

-¡Hoy! ¡Hoy! Había que llegar a la meta trazada por la propia alegría. Mañana ya no era importante. De ayer ¿quién se acordaba? ¡Hoy! ¡Hoy! (p. 176)

In this work, Magdalena Mondragón points out the overwhelming, almost impossible task of changing the living conditions of the poor in Mexico.

¡Cuánta gente muerta! Crucificados, agónicos por su fracaso de no vivir; ... La misma miseria en todas partes. Los de aquí y los de las colonias proletarias; los de las minas de arena y los hombres en los campos ... (p. 160)

For these people and their counterparts throughout Mexico, 'la tierra' must necessarily be 'farther on.'

While Magdalena Mondragón does not hesitate to blame, either directly or indirectly, the mestizo for his lack of judgment and ignorance which plunge him into his own doom, she does not hesitate either to tell us about his human element and tenderness. In Más allá existe la tierra, the protagonist, Simón Gutiérrez, is the symbol of tenderness but this tenderness does not emerge until after he finds out that Rosa is going to have his child. This apparently transforms him into a different person. The love he has for the land is transferred to Rosa and their child. Then his love extends to all men regardless of race or color.

Perhaps the protagonists, Rosa, a white Mexican, and Simón, an Indian Mexican, symbolize in their union and in their child, born under great pain, the true solution for the Mexican people, which lies in the elimination of the racial and social barriers and in the unselfish dedication to the work that has to be done, whether on the dry, barren land or in politics.²

²Gabriele von Munk Benton, "Women Writers of Contemporary México," Books Abroad, XXXIII (1959), p. 17.

In Magdalena Mondragón's novels of social protest we see how tragedy shatters all possibility of fulfilling their dreams and hopes. The incessant struggle for survival ends in utter futility. She clearly illustrates the vicious circle in which they are caught. The life of the poor peon assumes a definite pattern of failure. This failure is brought out in her novels and one is aware of the frustrations and instability that permeate the Indian's life.

Perhaps this is why the mestizo is reluctant to consider the future. Perhaps this is why he develops his unique philosophy of living only for today, for this moment and for this moment alone.

Throughout her novels, Magdalena Mondragón presents to her readers the heart and soul and thoughts of the poor Mexican, and why he is the way he is. She has the unique talent of describing his philosophy. She relates the sad, human drama in a realistic and sentimental way. She chooses her words carefully, always including many paragraphs with a poetic touch.

Many of her contemporaries write about the Indian situation but Magdalena Mondragón excels in portraying the individual as what he is and as a representative of the masses, the heartbeat and spirit of Mexico. She does not write merely to entertain but assumes the role of spokeswoman for those she loves. We realize that one of her purposes in writing is to expose the social conditions and

injustices of the provincial masses to her limited number of readers. This does not, by any means, convey the idea that her works have less literary value.

Unfortunately, many of her works are unread, since her novels are concentrated on a specific geographic location. Except for Yo, como pobre, whose setting is the garbage dump area of the proletariat section of Mexico City, all the novels deal with the poor of the provinces. Since these novels are confined to one specific area of the world, naturally, they relate customs of sex, politics, etc. which are unique to this area. Consequently, the theme of these regional novels is such that they did not and cannot, with a few exceptions, achieve universal appeal. A non-Mexican reader who is unfamiliar with Mexican history, the socio-economic situation, customs and philosophy will undoubtedly overlook or misunderstand many of the points and subtleties stressed by Magdalena Mondragón. Knowing little or nothing about Mexico, the reader cannot easily identify himself with any of the protagonists, especially if he is a member of the middle or upper-class of a different culture.

Beyond Mexican frontiers, one would have to specialize in Mexican, or at least Latin American, literature to become familiarized with her novels. Her novels are a worthwhile supplement to sociologists for use in case studies of cultures, and economists who are interested in studies of low-income peoples. The question of language may present another

problem. Only three translations are known to exist.

Yo, como pobre was translated into English and it is next to impossible to either borrow or purchase a copy. Jerry Hannifin³ of Time Magazine translated Más allá existe la tierra into English but no copy of it could be found.

El día no llega was translated into German by Elizabeth Despang but research yielded no information on her or on the work.

³Hannifin states that he does not possess a copy of his translation nor can he furnish the name of the publisher. (February 27, 1965, personal correspondence)

CHAPTER IV

NEW APPROACH OF THE LATEST NOVELS OF MAGDALENA MONDRAGON

The latest novels of Magdalena Mondragón reflect the diversity of theme which, up until this point, was exhibited only in her plays. Two modern novels, El día no llega and Tenemos sed, are not, primarily, novels of social protest. El día no llega, published in 1950, is an unusual novel of philosophy and phantasy. It has been called, by Gilberto González y Contreras, one of the most significant books of the last decade. Tenemos sed, published in 1954, relates the hardships and the progress of the people but it lacks the oppression and fatalism of her earlier works. In this novel, Magdalena Mondragón writes of a new, emergent Mexico; a Mexico whose people have learned to work together for the common good.

Since Magdalena Mondragón's writing is based on realism, any change in the reality surrounding her must be reflected in her works. With Tenemos sed she continues the transition from novels of social protest to novels of social progress.

EL DIA NO LLEGA

El día no llega, published in 1950, is a complete departure from the exposition of social problems and the social protest found in most of Magdalena Mondragón's novels. This novel is spiritual and psychological in tone and is not based on realism as are the others. It is primarily a philosophical work, with the characters probing for the meaning of almost every phase of human existence.

The narrator in El día no llega is a Dream who enters into people who suffer from inescapable realities and permits them to withdraw from this reality, to acquire strength, to conquer the world, to be happy and not to think about death.

As the two main protagonists, Rafael and the troubadour, called El hombre, grope their ways through life, they are forever searching for its meaning. Fearing death, but more afraid of life, they retreat, from time to time, into the Dream. Awake or asleep, when reality becomes unbearable, they retreat to fantasy. The Dream exists only in them, incapable of initiating or preventing action, capable only of seeing and reporting it. Eventually, El hombre finds that the true meaning of life is in dreams, that while men have their dreams, the day that life and the spirit can or must die does not come.

The Dream, in El día no llega, is a static character. It is very important to the narrative but has no power to control the other characters except by permitting them to escape within themselves.

Yo, el Sueño, lo contemplo y quiero meterme en su cabeza. Si él soñara un poco, tendría remedio;
 ¡No, no! Mi voz que no tiene boca no podrá ser oída y mis ojos cansados por su cansancio no pueden ser mirados... (p. 122)

Most of the action in El día no llega takes place in Mexico, but some, by means of flashbacks, takes place in New York City. Fairies, fairy godmothers, Alice in Wonderland and Don Quixote are a few of the references used to give depth and meaning to this philosophical novel of man's search for the true meanings of life and death. Magdalena Mondragón also devotes several pages to the pharoah's dreams in Genesis from the Bible.

Y aconteció que pasados dos años tuvo Faraón un sueño: parecíale que estaba junto al río; y que al río subían siete vacas hermosas a la vista y muy gordas y pacían en el prado;... (etc.) (p. 61)

After two whole years, Pharoah dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, and behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows, sleek and fat, and they fed in the reed grass. (etc.) (41:1)

Magdalena Mondragón uses an advanced technique in this novel. El día no llega is narrated in the first person,

by a Dream. The action and dialog are written in the usual third person, and all the thoughts and musings of the protagonists are written within quotation marks. Each of the three separate stories, the action, and the thoughts are unified and made into the whole novel by the first person narrative of the Dream. The novel is written in three thinly connected parts. The first story is minor, more or less introductory. The last two constitute the major part of the novel. The connection among the three protagonists has no bearing on the plot. As a means of implementing the forward progress, Magdalena Mondragón has the life of Flavio, the first protagonist, touch the life of Rafael, the second protagonist, in such a small way that they do not even meet. The life of Rafael does not ever touch the life of El hombre, the third protagonist, rather this transition is carried out by strangers to both who go from the dead Rafael's room to the cabaret where the troubadour is singing. The only connections among the three are time and space.

El día no llega is a modern novel of great depth. It is a mixture of fantasy and realism that probes into the inner recesses of men's minds and men's souls. In its style, its profundity and its meaning for all men, Magdalena Mondragón displays her talent for diversity and her compassion for mankind.

TENEMOS SED

Notably different from Magdalena Mondragón's novels of social protest, Tenemos sed, published in 1954, is based on the campesinos' struggle to conquer the obstacles of the land; in this instance, the lack of irrigation. She reveals to us the hardships encountered by them which are the hardships that still exist in many sections of Mexico.

Most of the action of this novel centers around the construction of the Falcon Dam on the Río Bravo, near Ciudad Guerrero la Vieja, approximately eighty miles south of Nuevo Laredo, in the State of Tamaulipas. The combined effort of Mexican and American engineers complete the dam in five years.

The protagonist of Tenemos sed, José García, is accompanied by his wife, Juana, and their children. He is in complete command of the construction workers and the building of the Falcon Dam. Upon its completion, the people rejoice for they would have an abundant supply of water which would convert the desert into fertile land. However, their rejoicing is short-lived. The long-sought and welcome rain comes but is accompanied by a tornado. The dam overflows, destroying forever ranches, cattle, personal possessions, etc. More tragic, it brings misery, disease, illness, and death to many people. Under José García's leadership, the surviving men, women, and children are rescued and transported in trucks to the nearly-completed Nueva Ciudad Guerrero,

an hour's drive from the Falcon Dam. Although the modern dwellings that await them are smaller than those of Ciudad Guerrero la Vieja, they are equipped with the conveniences of gas, electricity, water, etc.

The campesinos settle down to begin a new life in their new surroundings. In spite of the difficult life, they manage to have entertainment from time to time. The youngsters enjoy a variety of sports and often attend films. The adults find relief from the arduous work by going to a neighbouring town on weekends.

One tragic day, their joyful activities temporarily cease. Nueva Ciudad Guerrero is quarantined because of an epidemic of diphtheria. The lack of sufficient medicine threatens many lives, including Lalo, one of the sons of José and Juana. A shipment of serum is expected but Lalo dies before it arrives.

José had longed to take his family to Mexico City where they could live in the comforts of civilization. But, added to the grief of losing their son, is Jose's order by the Compañía Constructora to go to El Cóbano, in the State of Michoacán. Leaving his family in Nueva Ciudad Guerrero, he resumes the task of building roads, dams, bridges, houses, etc. Once the project at El Cóbano is underway, José returns to Ciudad Guerrero la Vieja to put the Falcon Dam into operation.

Upon completion of this last phase of the Falcon project, the campesinos finally realize, after five years of impatient waiting, that they will have water during the dry season.

José and his family leave for El Cóbano where they will embark on another cycle of their kind of life; primitive living conditions, physical hardships, and the birth of another child.

In the character of José García, there is determination, firmness, and the excellence of judgment. These qualities, combined with tenderness and compassion, enable him to fulfill his ideals and ambition in life. Because of the kind of work he does, he and his family suffer the discomforts of primitive living, so that the inhabitants of the hinterlands may live better.

Dos, tres, cuatro años de intenso trabajo, de olvidarse del mundo, de las diversiones y entegrarse en cuerpo y alma a la tarea, a la dura tarea de hacer floreciente, habitable una zona; ... (p. 161)

He feels a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction in his work. As he watches a dam being built, he experiences pride and a sense of power. He feels a very deep pleasure as the work develops. His strong character and enthusiasm require the nourishment which is in the form of giving orders. Without doubt, he is a man accustomed to command. His

imposing and authoritative personality is such that other men are dwarfed by his presence. Even to his wife, Juana, he is an idol, she worships him. In spite of the difficulties of the transient life of a construction worker's family she refuses to leave his side.

The people in Tenemos sed fulfill the hopes and expectations of the people in Magdalena Mondragón's novels of social protest. As was stated previously, the characters looked always to the future for a better life. Even with hard work and education the characters in her earlier novels usually failed. The pattern of failure repeated itself over and over again throughout Puede que'l otro año, Yo, como pobre, and Más allá existe la tierra. The hacendados, so prominent in the earlier novels, are not mentioned in Tenemos sed; the government, usually depicted as corrupt and ineffectual in helping the people, becomes just the opposite. It responds quickly to the needs of the people, furnishing homes, land, etc. almost immediately. The people, instead of becoming victims of fatalism and living only for the day, work with the construction company and make demands of the company and the government; demands which are met. The campesinos are organized. They have a municipal president, hold town meetings to decide their common needs and set up committees to seek solutions to their problems. They are a functioning community.

There is movement in Tenemos sed, as there is in Más allá existe la tierra, but movement with purpose. The construction workers move from state to state, building dams, roads, and houses. They live in temporary housing, often in poor climates, far from any large cities, but they are highly skilled workers, amply paid for their labor. This mobility and other elements give Tenemos sed much more universal appeal to readers. The nature of the work, the mobility of the construction crews, the highly skilled, amply paid workers, college-trained engineers, the proximity to the United States border and the kinds of people represented are all much more readily understood, at least by American readers. A reader can identify himself with Juana or José or the young bachelor engineers, since their experiences are similar to the experiences of other mobile, working Americans.

Again, with Tenemos sed, Magdalena Mondragón's title is symbolic. The campesinos not only thirst for water, the precious liquid that is essential to all life, but also for other essentials of man.

Nos morimos de sed; de sed de justicia, de comprensión, de bondad, de amor ... Pero principalmente nos morimos por falta de agua. (p. 163)

In Tenemos sed Magdalena Mondragón shows us the new Mexico. The problems remain but solutions are beginning to be found. The problem of the struggle of the people for

is pointed out in the picture of the women of El Cóbano carrying water from the river to their homes; a daily chore over a long distance. The problem of government disinterest in the individual is illustrated by the plight of the Mexican "wet-back" in the United States "concentration camps." There is tragedy in their daily lives but, for the most part, it is objective; it happens near them but not to them. Even their own personal tragedies are overcome and overshadowed by the task before them. Thus, for the first time, one of Magdalena Mondragón's novels ends on an optimistic note. The campesinos, in union with construction workers from all over Mexico and from the United States, work together and succeed; they accomplish what they set out to do: bring water to the desert.

CHAPTER V

MAGDALENA MONDRAGON'S PLAYS

During her literary career, Magdalena Mondragón wrote novels and play simultaneously. While social protest is the dominant factor in many of her novels, she resorts to diversified themes for her plays. These themes range from racial discrimination, marriage conflicts, contemporary social problems, phantasy, a Biblical story, and Greek mythology to political unrest, and tribal justice. Some are philosophical in nature, others are psychological, and still others are both.

Each play includes clear and detailed stage directions and a description of the gestures and facial expressions of each character. A description of the character is given along with the type of person that should undertake a particular role or roles. Sound and lighting effects help to create desired atmosphere. These stage directions are beneficial to the reader, enabling him to better visualize or imagine the action and setting. They are of value to a theatrical group that may stage any of her plays.

To illustrate Magdalena Mondragón's talent as an accomplished playwright and the universal appeal of her themes, three plays have been chosen. Two of the plays, Cuando Eva

se vuelve Adán and ¡Porque me da la gana!, concern modern topics while one, El mundo perdido, is historical.

CUANDO EVA SE VUELVE ADAN

Cuando Eva se vuelve Adán, Magdalena Mondragón's first play, was written in 1938. Although this three-act alta comedia was written twenty-seven years ago, its characters are confronted by problems that could be compared to current problems. The action takes place in a large city among educated, intelligent people. The main theme centers around the position of women in society. Magdalena Mondragón raises the problem of the modern practice of women following careers, working outside the home and competing with men, as opposed to the old practice of women staying at home, surrounded by children. The concept of competition is especially strong between the protagonists of this play. Their conflict is solved by the woman, Eloisa, but not in the expected manner. In this play there is the social conflict; the importance of a career to a woman and the competition it causes, and the personal conflicts of Eduardo and Eva, which are embodied in it.

In Cuando Eva se vuelve Adán, Eduardo is married to Eloisa, a successful physician. He thinks that she feels

superior to him, but, in truth, he feels inferior to her. He feels that she has gone beyond him, does not have the proper respect for him, making him less than a man and no longer head of his house. He and his friend agree that the women of today are not like women used to be, they do not inspire a man to feel spiritually and physically superior to them, as they should. Eloisa is a very proud and intelligent woman who confesses that she is not a "woman of the house," staying at home does not appeal to her. She loves her profession, feels it is an art and does not want to give it up. She loves her husband devotedly, to the point of veneration. She realizes that he has become cool toward her, loves her less than he did and she is suffering greatly because of this. But when it is suggested that she give up her profession she says she could never do that, she could never enclose herself in four walls and depend on a man for money. Her profession is one of her reasons for living. But she later admits that anything is preferable to losing her husband.

Ironically, as Eloisa contemplates giving up everything to keep her husband, a young woman who works in a factory comes to her office for medical help. As the woman, Elvira, unfolds her unhappy story of loneliness, a chance meeting with a good man, living with the man as his wife, of the man's admission that he doesn't love his legal wife, Elvira's resulting pregnancy and her "husband's" happiness

about it, Eloisa realizes that the man in the story is her husband, Eduardo. At this point, she faints.

In the final act, Eloisa talks to Eduardo at great length, telling him of her great love for him, her jealousy, the wishes and hopes she had for them and the evils she committed by putting her profession first in her life. She admits that women pay a great price when they try to take over the man's role in life, when Eve wishes to become Adam. Eloisa asks Eduardo for a divorce. He argues with her, begging her to stay with him. At that point, she receives a telephone call from the hospital and tells Eduardo, who is ignorant of Elvira's arrangements with his wife, that she is going to deliver his child. She insists that Eduardo go with her to be with Elvira and announces that now, with her own hands, she can give him the one thing she hasn't given him ... a child. After the birth of the child, Eloisa leaves Eduardo, assuring him that she will not suffer because her act will make him happy. As the play ends, she bitterly prepares to leave on a professional trip. Standing alone, she tells herself that there is only one law in the world, the law that she had forgotten: to know how to love, to be the wife of her husband.

The conflict within Eduardo is between life as he thinks it should be and life as it is. He feels that a woman should be physically and mentally weaker than a man yet lives with a woman who is stronger. He feels that he

and Eloisa never should have married yet tries to keep her with him when she asks for a divorce. Every phase of his life with Eloisa negates what he thinks life should be.

The conflict within Eloisa lies between her profession and her husband. She loves her husband completely and longs for his affection, attention and caresses. But she is not willing to live only as his wife or to depend on him for financial support. She loves her profession and feels that she is making a contribution to humanity through medicine. Only when she is confronted with the possible loss of her husband does she even consider leaving her profession.

Cuando Eva se vuelve Adán is written in the tragic form described by Richard Sewall, with Eloisa as the tragic hero.

There has been suffering and disaster, ultimate and irredeemable loss and there is promise of more to come. But all who are involved have been witness to new revelations about human existence, the evil of evil and the goodness of good. They are more "ready." The same old paradoxes and ambiguities remain, but for the moment they are transcended in the higher vision.¹

Eloisa is the tragic hero in that the responsibility for resolving their personal conflict is taken by her.

¹Richard B. Sewall, "The Tragic Form," Aspects of Drama, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1962, p. 63.

... tragic man accepts the conflict. It is horrible to do it, he says, but it is more horrible to leave it undone. . . . He proceeds, suffers, and in his suffering, "learns."²

She did not resolve the social conflict; she retained her career, but she resolved their personal conflict by sacrificing herself for her husband's happiness.

As did Shakespeare, Magdalena Mondragón inserts comic relief in Cuando Eva se vuelve Adán as a means of creating dramatic impact and holding the attention of the audience. In Act II, the tension becomes almost unbearable as the scene between Elvira and Eloisa develops, culminating in Eloisa's faint. To offer relief and to heighten the impact of the scene between Eloisa and Eduardo, Magdalena Mondragón, in Act III, inserts the scene between Rodríguez and Dr. Garza.

In this scene, Rodríguez, who is always chasing women, teases Dr. Garza, a friend and colleague of Eloisa. He taunts her, takes off her unbecoming glasses, ruffles her prudish coiffure and says she could be very attractive if she would try to look like a woman. During this repartee, while Dr. Garza scoffs at Rodríguez and tries to ignore him, he asks her to run away with him or to marry him, insisting that he would not mind having her support him financially so long as she is ultra-feminine when they are at home alone.

²Ibid., p. 61.

Magdalena Mondragón, while lowering the tension and permitting her audience to relax, before she builds the tension again, never lets them forget the message of her play. Even into this light-hearted, humorous scene, she skillfully and subtly weaves the theme, the career-versus-home role of women.

;PORQUE ME DA LA GANA!

;Porque me da la gana!, a four-act alta comedia, was published in 1953. This play has cosmopolitan qualities which differentiate it from several of her other plays and most of her novels. The novels, as we have seen, reverberate with regionalism. The mention of current movie actresses, Italian nobility, and scenes that take place in a beauty shop where the application of the latest beauty aids are discussed, makes this play more urban and modern.

The plot of ;Porque me da la gana! centers around Jobita Layton's fear of growing old. She is a snake charmer in a carnival, who feels that this is a man's world, that it is made by and for men and the only way women can compete is by remaining young and beautiful. She philosophizes that to be young and beautiful is the key to happiness. Raúl, her husband for twenty-five years, tries to convince her that to

the man who loves her, each woman is beautiful. But, so great is her fear of growing old, she does not believe him.

As a solution to her "problem," she enters a beauty salon. There, all the women discuss the infidelity of husbands, especially with younger women, and how easy it is to get a man but how difficult it is to keep him. They complain about the difficulty and pain a woman goes through with creams, lotions, hair dyes, diets, exercises, etc., to stay young and beautiful and thereby keep the affections of her man. There, she is told that the quickest way to lose years is by plastic surgery and a surgeon is recommended to her. Telling Raúl only that she is taking a vacation, and taking all their savings, Jobita goes to the surgeon for treatment, convinced that when Raúl sees her looking like a young girl, he will fall in love with her again.

After the operation, an old friend, Lelia, comes to Jobita's vacation home to see her. She does not recognize Jobita because she looks so young. Although Lelia admits that Jobita is very handsome, she states that she looks cold and heartless. In an effort to feel and stay as young as she looks, Jobita has been trying to keep up with a group of young people in their mountain climbing and dancing activities. She, however, is very tired from all this and wonders why she ever wanted to be young and subject to the miseries and absurd things of the young. But she does not know how to stop and asks her friend what she should do. Raúl comes

to visit her and does not like what he finds. She looks young again but acts differently. She is not the same woman he married and loves. He refuses to believe that she is the same woman he married, saying that she is no longer a good companion, that now she won't eat, drink, go out at night, read with him or let him caress her because of the adverse affect these things might have on her figure or her face. Raúl likes her the way she was. He feels that wrinkles and lines on a woman's face are a sign of time, sadness, happiness and the beauty of suffering; that the important thing is to live a full life and you will not grow old. He states that with suffering we acquire maturity. Then he leaves her, telling her that he will return if she becomes her old self again and if she does not, he will have to look for another woman. Ironically, this is exactly what Jobita is trying so desperately to avoid.

In the fourth act, Jobita begins to recapture her past, through memory. She lives her life again, in her mind, with all its joy and grief and, as she does, the lines and wrinkles are again etched into her face. When Raúl returns, she looks as she did before she had surgery. He is very impressed and happy. He sees that she has become human-looking again, that she is more beautiful than when they first met and he redeclares his love for her. He then claims that taking her face between his hands is like elevating the sacred host to the heavens; to caress her face is

to caress life; and as the curtain falls, he states that she has found the peace that beautifies her.

¡Porque me da la gana! is outstanding among Magdalena Mondragón's works because of its departure from the norm in the roles played by her men and women. In most of her work, the men are weak and/or cruel, either unintentionally or maliciously. In this play, the man, Raúl, in spite of being mistreated and misunderstood by Jobita, remains strong, loyal and steadfast, forcing her back to her senses and saving their marriage. The women in her works are usually dominant, strong, and level-headed. Jobita is none of these. She mistrusted her husband, who had not ever given her reason to, left him for a separate "vacation" and spent most of their savings on plastic surgery without telling him why or where she was going. She showed her weakness by doing all these things because of unfounded fears and baseless imaginings.

Each of the four acts contains colorful and descriptive passages. From beginning to end the dialog between Jobita and her husband, Raúl, is emotional and often extremely tender, attaining poetic heights. For example, in the first act, Raúl says:

Ya vamos a cumplir nuestras "bodas de plata,"
mujer. Mira, el matrimonio ha llegado a ser para
mí algo tan íntimo, tan bello, que no cuento jamás
los días a tu lado. Tú formas parte de mi ser. . . .
(p. 14)

But in some instances, these scenes become so poetic that it is inconceivable, at least to the non-Latin, that such profound and flowery expressions could come from a man whom we would call a "carney," as in the fourth act when Raúl tells Jobita:

Eres sabia como el tiempo y apasionante como la vida. Déjame mirarme en tus ojos. Son como los de alguien que ha visto muchos paisajes. Me parece que puedo mirar el mundo a través de tus silencios. Sí; tu espíritu es la fuente de Juvencio. Juvencia será tu nombre, desde ahora. (p. 128)

To embellish the dialogs further, Magdalena Mondragón has them quote, from the Bible, parts of The Song of Solomon.

Raúl: ¿Sabes el Cantar de los Cantares? ¿Puedes repetir algo?

Jobita: Tú eres mi Cantar de los Cantares.

Raúl: He aquí que tú eres hermosa, amiga mía.
He aquí que tú eres hermosa;
Tus ojos entre tus quedejas, como de
paloma;
Tus cabellos como manada de cabras
Que se muestran desde el monte de Galaad...

The Song of Solomon - 4:1

Behold, you are beautiful, my love,
Behold, you are beautiful!
Your eyes are doves
behind your veil.
Your hair is like a flock of goats,
moving down the slopes of Gilead.

Jobita: Yo soy de mi amado y mi amado es mío.

The Song of Solomon - 6:3

I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine;

Raúl: ¿Quién es ésta que se muestra como
 el alba,
Hermosa como la luna, esclarecida
 como el sol,
Imponente como ejércitos en orden?
¡Qué hermosa eres y cuán suave,
 Oh, amor deleitoso!

The Song of Solomon - 6:10

Who is this that looks forth like
 the dawn,
Fair as the moon, bright as the
 sun,
Terrible as an army with banners?
How fair and pleasant you are,
 O loved one, delectable maiden. (p. 128)

This play is ironic and the focal point of the irony
appears in these two speeches at the end of act three.

Raúl: ¡Estás muerta ... muerta! Ni siquiera te
 ríes, no te desvelas, no bebes, no comes
no eres ya un ser humano. No eres la
mujer que yo amé, ni la que quiero seguir
amando. Si continúas así, me obligarás
a buscar otra mujer. (p. 107)

Jobita: Por favor. Quédate. Si es por ti todo
 lo que hago, Por favor. He ido al
cirujano plástico y he tenido miedo de
que las arrugas vuelvan...¡pero ya no!
En eso he gastado el dinero. Escúchame.
(Casi grita y llega hasta la puerta)
(Sollozando sobre ella) Se ha ido...
¡No me escuchó! ¡No me escuchó! Y
costó tanto trabajo decirle que me
avergonzaba de estar vieja.... (p. 107)

Act IV of ¡Porque me da la gana! has great dramatic effect on the stage. The staging procedure is rather complicated but brings out the true message of the play with powerful impact. In the scenes in which Jobita remembers and relives all the joy and grief in her past life, three actresses are used. At first, the lights focus on Jobita, seated on the stage alone as she describes her situation, leaving the rest of the stage in darkness. As she remembers events from her early youth, the lights shift to a young actress of about fifteen years, in the company of a young man. This young girl then speaks as Jobita in her youth. At the end of the scene, the lights refocus on Jobita. This use of light and actresses occurs again when Jobita remembers events from her life at the age of thirty. In this case, the third actress, more mature than the first, represents Jobita and speaks for her. Jobita is seated on the stage at all times but seen only when the lights play upon her.

¡Porque me da la gana! is a tender, moving play. It clearly illustrates Magdalena Mondragón's complete understanding of women and their fears and the compassion she has for them.

EL MUNDO PERDIDO

The play, El mundo perdido, published in 1952, will be familiar to most readers. Magdalena Mondragón used the Biblical story of Adam and Eve as a base for the plot and then expanded on it. The Bible gives only the facts of the creation of Adam and Eve, their orders from God, their fall from grace and their expulsion from Paradise. Magdalena Mondragón explores the personalities of Adam and Eve, not only as two people but as symbols of Man and Woman. She shows us the interplay of human emotions and the way they affect human actions.

In El mundo perdido, Adán, created by God, lived alone in Paradise. He became lonely so, from his rib, God created a mate for him. His mate, Eva apparently was a bird before she became a woman and has knowledge of the world and other things of which Adán is ignorant. Adán warns Eva not to touch or eat from the Tree of Good and Evil, as it is forbidden by God. Eva, however, hears the voice of a serpent, as if in a dream, telling her to eat the beautiful fruit of the Tree of Good and Evil and to induce Adán to eat it too. Adán is shocked and orders her not to touch it. He then describes for her the other world they will create if they disobey God. He tells her of the horrors of suffering, of sadness, of old age, infirmity and death; things

they will never experience if they obey God. Adán and Eva argue for a long time; he, warning her of the perils of the world, and she, desiring to live in this world, countering his warnings with arguments gained from intuition and from the words of the serpent. She picks the apple from the Tree, but Adán, through guile and flattery, gets it from her. She begs him, commands him, to eat it. Adán, invoking God's help, destroys it.

At the beginning of the third act, Adán and Eva have been living together, in Paradise, for two thousand years. They are not happy. In all those years, nothing has changed, all the days are alike and each day will continue to be like the day before it, forever. Adán describes it as horrible. They agree that they are both bored with life in Paradise. There is no release for them, however, for there is no death in Paradise and since they have destroyed the apple, they cannot leave or be expelled. Adán tells Eva that he believes suffering, grief, sickness and death as best, they are the true life. She responds that if they had eaten the apple, they would have created a world for their children and grandchildren; that misery and destruction are not important because one must destroy to create.

Adán and Eva lament the fact that they are "condemned" to Paradise. Eva goes to look for the serpent, hoping he can help to release them. During her absence, the serpent appears to Adán. He tells Adán that he has made him suffer the

worst punishment a man can suffer; discontent. Adán wishes to kill the serpent, but realizes that the animal is already dead. So Adán forms a figure-eight from the body of the serpent, puts it around his neck and then around Eva's and strangles them both. As they are dying, they feel free from the discontent and boredom of Paradise, but regret that they are not creating a world to leave behind them.

Magdalena Mondragón uses Adán's and Eva's ignorance and innocence of our world as a means of exposition of certain timely social problems. The matter of racial prejudice, which she mentions in other plays and in her novels, is discussed by Adán and Eva in the second act of El mundo perdido. Adán explains to Eva what God had revealed to him in a dream; that men of different colors and different races fight to oppress each other, usually with the same result.

... pero casi siempre los blancos oprimían a los negros, a los amarillos y a los cobrizos. (p. 78)

He further states that they can do nothing about it; it is useless even to protest.

Eva asks if he believes that these differences would exist if the men were nude. She then advances her solution for the problem of color; the eventual, natural abolition of skin-color tones.

Fíjate, el sol caería a plomo sobre todos, y las pieles se volverían oscuras ... Ya no habría hombres blancos, sólo negros. Negros de sol, de luz, de vida natural y hermosa ... Nosotros nos volveremos negros con los siglos. (p. 78)

Adán points out to her that they are already dark, but that she hadn't noticed it because the river, her only mirror, is muddy from the recent rain. He then asks what color he appears to her. She replies that she sees the color of the earth, after the rain; the color she thinks is beautiful. "Yo la veo del color de la tierra, cuando llueve; y como amo la tierra, la color de tu piel me parece hermosa." (p. 78)

Adán then lists for her the various colors and races of people and the countries in which they live. People of his color live in India, Peru, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile and other places but are plentiful in Mexico. He describes the Mexican people as being very beautiful, filled with peace and spirit. He goes on to place the yellow people in China, those the color of autumn leaves in Arabia, and mentions the accomplishments of both. It seems significant that, after the first brief mention, the white and black races are not mentioned again. Magdalena Mondragón, in spite of the fact that these two races constitute at least half of the world's population, neither places them geographically nor relates any of their characteristics or accomplishments. It is possible that she, to use her words from Saludo a la vida, "les ve con malos ojos."

As in many of her other works, Magdalena Mondragón, in this play, draws on ideas from other literary figures. Adán tells Eva that God showed him the world of men who wear clothes of different kinds to tell each other apart and that, in war, a group with one kind of uniform fights against a group wearing another kind of uniform. This prompts Eva to suggest that many evil things could be prevented if only men would adopt the principal of nudity. She stated that men fight for cars, jewels, and other equally superfluous things which they need to show-off certain clothing. They make wars because they shoot at the uniform, which represents hatred, rather than at other men; forgetting what is under the uniform.

Hacen las guerras porque disparan no sobre otro hombre, sino sobre un uniforme que representa enemistad y se olvidan que dentro del uniforme hay un cuerpo humano; ... (p. 79)

In this speech, Eva espouses some of the philosophy of Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) in his book, Sartor Resartus;

... he (man) wears clothes, which are the visible emblems.... Society, which the more I think of it astonishes me the more, is founded on Cloth.

What would Majesty do, could such an accident befall in reality; should the buttons all simultaneously start, and the solid wool evaporate? ... the whole fabric of Government, Legislation, Property, Police and Civilized Society, are dissolved in wails and howls. Lives the man that can figure a naked Duke of Windlestraw addressing a naked House of Lords? Imagination recoils on

itself, and will not forward the picture ... And yet why is the thing impossible? Was not every body of these Guardians of our Liberties, naked, or nearly so, last night?³

El mundo perdido, though based on the well-known Biblical story in Genesis 2:6 to 5:5, has several different aspects. In the Bible and in the play, God created Adam from dust and created Eve from Adam's rib to be Adam's companion. The serpent, in both, represents Evil and the apple represents the knowledge of good and evil. However, the play brings out a new concept in the boredom of the two characters with Paradise and their discussions of life as it would be in the world. In the Bible, God punished Adam and Eve, and through them, all mankind. Then he sent them from the Garden of Eden to create, through their children, a world of men. In El mundo perdido, Adán and Eva lose their opportunity to create this world when they destroy the apple but escape from Paradise through death, with the help of Evil, at their own hands.

Thus, Magdalena Mondragón shows us that though man, represented by Adán, is created by God and in God's image, he is not divine. He is human and prone to suffer the evils that men must suffer; the worst of these being discontent.

Sólo Dios sería capaz de vivir eternamente en el paraíso terrenal ... Pero tú no eres más que un hombre ... (p. 90)

³Thomas Carlyle, Collected Works of Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, Book I, Chapter IX, Greystone Press, New York.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

El escritor, como el árbol, crece de su propia semilla pero debe alimentarse y asentarse en la tierra y recibir los alientos vitales de la atmósfera que lo circunda.¹

As a writer, Magdalena Mondragón received her nourishment in the form of an echoing cry emanating from the hundreds upon hundreds of Mexicans. Their cry has its origin in the gloomy abyss of misery and deprivation. She became familiarized with the misery of the unfortunate by witnessing the social and political conditions during her youth. She chose to devote her life to crusading against the injustices experienced by her countrymen.

, Throughout Magdalena Mondragón's works is reflected the hope that the masses have for a better life. However, her works simultaneously reflect the despair and pessimism that the masses have of seeing it in their lifetime. This is the great paradox of the Mexican Indian.

Even the titles of her novels convey this paradox to the reader. Puede que'l otro año, Más allá existe la tierra,

¹José Luis Martínez, "Situación de la literatura mexicana contemporánea," Cuadernos Americanos, vol. XLII, México, 1948, p. 243.

Tenemos sed, El día no llega, and Someday the Dream (English title of Yo, como pobre) each illustrates, symbolically or literally, the paradox of hope and despair.

Most of her plays, while not written in protest, still represent her love for the Mexican people in the form of exploring and exposing the problems of various social classes.

Magdalena Mondragón is not a superficial writer. At each reading, one discovers new meaning, new depth in both the characters and events. While writing with great depth and insight, she masterfully presents almost every phase of Mexican life. She vividly portrays the customs, habits, and practices of the daily life of the Mexican and with deep insight discloses the values and emotions of the Mexican character. In her works, she makes the dialogue of each character more credulous and realistic by using the language of the various social levels.

Her thorough knowledge of the Mexican people and their problems coupled with her overwhelming desire to help them in their struggle for justice, makes Magdalena Mondragón one of the foremost champions of the oppressed in contemporary Mexican literature.

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