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MATERNAL IDENTITY, GRIEF, AND CREATIVE SUBJECTIVITY IN *NIÑO Y SOMBRAS* BY CONCHA MÉNDEZ

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MATERNAL IDENTITY, GRIEF, AND CREATIVE SUBJECTIVITY
IN *NIÑO Y SOMBRAS* BY CONCHA MÉNDEZ

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES, LITERATURES, AND
LINGUISTICS

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I dedicate this dissertation to the people who have given so much to get me to this day: my children Joseph and Anika and my husband David.

I also dedicate this dissertation to the strong and loving women who have taught me about life and grief: my mother Waynel Walling Green, my grandmothers Ilma Jo Whorton Walling (1915-2001) and Gladys Irene Blackburn Green (1915-2012), and my great-grandmother Cordelia Viola Lindsey Walling (1890-1994) who grieved until her death for Nell, the three-year-old daughter she lost to diphtheria on November 27, 1922.

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Abstract

The poetry of Concha Mendez reflects the human condition, particularly motherhood and grief in a Spanish context. This dissertation examines the embodied, relational, dynamic, and adaptable maternal identity; the mother's grief process in response to perinatal death; and creative subjectivity in the twenty-eight poems that form *Niño y sombras* by Concha Méndez. This analysis draws from Christine Battersby's *The Phenomenal Woman*, a seminal work of feminist philosophy. Explored from a matrifocal perspective, insight is gained into the expression of Mendez's maternal identity, how the stillbirth of her son and her subsequent grief process impacted that maternal identity, and finally how Méndez affirmed herself as creative subject, using poetry to create meaning and communicate her maternal experience. Bereft of more formal mourning rituals, Mendez recorded her memories, experiences, and grief surrounding the loss of her son in the poems of *Niño y sombras.* Méndez composed these memories in a poetic ritual to recognize the significance of her child, his death, and her own heartache. In addition, the analysis of the poems provides insight into early twentieth-century Spanish women's lived experiences of motherhood and grief.

Chapter I: Introduction

Concha Méndez wrote her collection of poems *Niño y sombras* in the direct aftermath of losing her first child at birth in March 1933. Three years later, Méndez and her husband Manuel Altolaguirre completed the printing of *Niño y sombras* on May 16, 1936. In the twenty-eight poems that form *Niño y sombras*, Concha Méndez provides a window into the cultural experience of motherhood and infant death in Spain during the 1930s and gives us insight into early twentieth-century Spanish women's lived experiences of motherhood. From her tragic loss and deep sorrow, Méndez created a poetic expression of the effects of death and grief on a maternal identity already established though not fully developed. The poems of *Niño y sombras* reveal a maternal identity that is embodied, relational, dynamic, and adaptable. This maternal identity is directly connected to the female body, it develops in relationship with the child, and it is dynamic as it adapts to changing circumstances. In addition, Méndez asserts her subjectivity as a poet and mother through these poems. In more theoretical terms, the mother-poet translates her lived experience of pregnancy, birth, and loss into poetic language thus creating her own subjectivity. In *Niño y sombras*, Méndez articulates her maternal identity and asserts a maternal subjectivity by creating meaning through her poetry. As a result, Méndez has created poetry which is of interest to readers because it is reflective of the human condition, and important to our understanding of motherhood in the Spanish context.

At the outset, this project proposed to study four authors whose works engaged with the experience of motherhood and loss—Concha Méndez, Carmen Conde, Juana Castro, and Tina Escaja. This project has evolved to focus only on Concha Méndez and

Niño y sombras. As I moved through the stages of my research, it became clear that this proposed focus was too broad and that Méndez deserved my full attention for this study. Concha Méndez is a fascinating author and figure among the Spanish artists and intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s. She along with Altolaguirre were highly influential publishers of many of the writers from the Generation of 1927. Although Méndez and her works have been studied in the past thirty years, the twenty-eight poems in *Niño y sombras* have received relatively scant attention.

My theoretical framework focused on maternal identity and subjectivity provides an original perspective for the analysis of Méndez's poems. My multi-faceted approach to the analysis of the text includes feminist philosophical theories of women's embodied and relational identities and subjectivities particularly influenced by Christine Battersby and Allison Stone, and John Bowlby and Ronald Knapp's psychological studies of grief and parental responses to child loss, as well as more traditional techniques such as close-reading. In the following chapters, I use these critical tools to analyze and demonstrate how the totality of the poems of *Niño y sombras* express the poet's embodied and relational maternal identity; provide insight into the cultural practices surrounding pregnancy, birth, and perinatal death in 1930s Spain; uncover the intimate process of the poet's grief and its creative expression; and finally I show how these poems affirm Méndez's maternal poetic subjectivity.

Scholarship on Concha Méndez

Interest in Concha Méndez's body of work has grown since the late 1980s, and her poetry has been incorporated in various anthologies of women's poetry. The feminist project of recovering forgotten women writers has brought attention to the

women writers and intellectuals of the Generation of 1927, and Méndez has been included in several studies on this topic. In addition, James Valender and others have spurred scholarship of Méndez's writings in the past 30 years. Finally, although several scholars consider *Niño y sombras* to be one of Méndez's finest poetry collections, there has been only one other full study of the collection.

Several anthologies focused on women poets contain poems by Méndez. In volume II of her extensive three-volume *Poetisas españolas: antología general* (1996), Luzmaría Jiménez Faro anthologizes six poems by Méndez, including two from *Niño y sombras* (Poems 2 and 9) along with a brief introduction. Manuel Francisco Reina incorporates four poems by Méndez into his anthology, *Mujeres de carne y verso: Antología poética femenina en lengua española del siglo XX* (2001). In the 2003 volume, *Ilimitada voz: (Antología de poetas españolas, 1940-2002)*, José María Balcells includes two poems by Méndez and discusses her body of work within the context of women poets of the Generation of 1927. Whereas, the critical anthology *Seis siglos de poesía española escrita por mujeres* (2007) has only one poem by Méndez along with an analysis by José Ángel Ascunce Arrieta.

Scholars focused on women writers of the Generation of 1927 have been more generous with their attention to Méndez. Gregory K. Cole in *Spanish Women Poets of the Generation of 1927* (2000) discusses Méndez as a member of this group and concisely analyzes six poems from *Niño y sombras*, which Cole calls "the poet's most original contribution to the Generation of 1927" (129). Emilio Miró also comments extensively on Méndez's corpus in the introduction to *Antología de Poetisas del 27* (1999) and anthologizes an ample number of poems from Méndez's body of work,

including eight poems from *Niño y sombras*. Margaret Persin examines Méndez first three books of poetry in "Moving to New Ground with Concha Méndez." (1997). Iker González-Allende also explores Méndez's early writings in "Cartografías urbanas y marítimas: Género y Modernismo en Concha Méndez" (2010). In *La construcción del yo femenino en la literatura* (2004), Biruté Ciplijauskaité discusses Méndez as a member of the Generation of 1927, deems *Niño y sombras* to be a high point in Méndez's poetry, and declares: "El tema de la maternidad como una experiencia vivida produce versos que son únicos en el repertorio de la generación" (102).

Méndez's granddaughter Paloma Ulacia Altolaguirre and Paloma's husband James Valender have been active in their efforts to publish Méndez's work and to generate interest in scholarship about her body of work. Ulacia Altolaguirre conducted and compiled oral interviews with Méndez to produce the memoirs *Concha Méndez: memorias habladas, memorias armadas* (1990). Valender has published a variety of articles and books on both Méndez and Altolaguirre including the 2001 book *Una mujer moderna: Concha Méndez en su mundo (1898-1986),* the proceedings from the seminar held in 1998 at the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid on the centennial of her birth. Sarah Leggott has written an interesting analysis of Méndez's memoirs in "The Woman Writer in 1920s Spain: Countering the Canon in Concha Méndez's *Memorias habladas, memorias armadas*" (2005).

Catherine Bellver discusses Méndez's poetry from various angles and touches briefly on the elegiac and maternal themes in her introduction to *Absence and Presence: Spanish Women Poets of the Twenties and Thirties* (2001), in the chapter from that same volume "Concha Méndez: Plotting the Route from Open Spaces to the Realm of

Shadows," and in the article "Hands, Touch, and Female Subjectivity in Four Spanish Women Poets" (2002). Bellver's article "Mothers, Daughters and the Female Tradition in the Poetry of Concha Méndez" (1998) concentrates primarily on the relationship between Méndez and her mother and daughter.

Several scholars specifically draw from *Niño y sombras* for their examinations of Méndez's poetry. Guiseppe Mazzocchi's chapter "Per una lettura de *Niño y sombra* [sic] di Concha Méndez" is included in *Manuel Altolaguirre y Concha Méndez: Una vida para la poesía: Actas de congreso internacional* (2005). Margaret Persin examines grief and Méndez's use of the genre of elegy with a particular attention to the poems of *Niño y sombras* in "Concha Méndez Cuesta: Memoria, duelo y redención elegíaca" from *Mujer, creación y exilio: España, 1939-1975* (2009).

Begoña Martínez Trufero is one of the few scholars to have studied *Niño y sombras* in depth. She examines the construction of identity in Méndez's body of work in the dissertation entitled "La construcción identitaria de una poeta del 27: Concha Méndez Cuesta (1898-1986)," and she focuses specifically on *Niño y sombras* in the chapter "El duelo de la madre como proceso de reafirmación de la identidad. *Niño y sombras* (1936)." Although much of Martínez Trufero's work complements my own, my analysis of Méndez's maternal identity as embodied and relational and of her creative subjectivity is unique and my thorough examination of the maternal grief process using work in psychology is wholly original.

There are very few books and only some articles that consider the issue of motherhood in Spanish women's poetry. Critics like Emilio Miró mention motherhood as a theme in women's writing but do not provide a full study. John Wilcox in *Women*

Poets of Spain (1997) considers the theme of mothering as a "gynocentric" focus in the poetry of many of the poets included in his study, including Méndez, but not in a detailed manner. On the other hand, Michelle Geoffrion-Vinci examines motherhood in two of her chapters in *Between the Maternal Aegis and the Abyss: Woman as Symbol in the Poetry of Rosalía de Castro* (2002). Despite the lack of this type of scholarship regarding Spanish authors, studies of motherhood in literature and the publication of poetry about motherhood have been increasing since the 1990s.

Scholarship on Motherhood

In "Maternal Literatures in Text and Tradition" the introduction to *Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts*, Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly outline the history of the literary scholarship related to motherhood studies. Feminist scholars began by studying the absence of the mother in literature and then progressed more recently to the study of the mother-daughter relationship. Podnieks and O'Reilly are critical of the daughter-centric focus of these studies (2). As a result, they call for a matrilineal and matrifocal approach to literary scholarship and encourage scholars to recognize mothers as writing subjects and to study issues of maternal aesthetics and maternal subjectivity (1-2).

Podnieks and O'Reilly state that "a central if not defining aim of motherhood studies has been to articulate and theorize 'the voice of the mother': to analyze, in other words, becoming and being a mother from the perspective and subjectivity of mothers themselves" (2-3). Acknowledging their debt to Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976), Podnieks and O'Reilly assert that "feminist writers and scholars alike endeavor to unmask motherhood by documenting the lived reality of mothering" (3). This

documentation functions as a type of "archaeology of motherhood" that allows them to begin to uncover "the truths of motherhood" (3). When basing their scholarship on women's lived experiences, feminists can counteract the idealization and unrealistic expectations that surround motherhood and negatively affect women.

In 1995, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Diana O'Hehir produced *Mothersongs*, an anthology of poems revolving around the maternal theme. In the preface, they state: "Although maternity has been celebrated and consecrated for centuries, and although as primary caretakers mothers have always helped shape civilization, poets have just in the last few decades begun to speak *as* mothers and *about* mothers with unprecedented complexity, intensity, and subtlety" (17). In the 1930s Concha Méndez was speaking as a mother through her complex and poignant poetry in *Niño y sombras*. My own project of matrifocal scholarship endeavors to study Méndez's poetic discourse about her own lived experience of being a mother and losing a child and to provide a means for her maternal voice to be heard more broadly.

In my opinion, Méndez—and poets like Carmen Conde and Juana Castro—participate in the unmasking of motherhood because "they speak truthfully and authentically about their experiences of mothering" as Podnieks and O'Reilly have proposed (3). Méndez speaks through her poems about the embodied experience of pregnancy, feeling the fetus move inside of her, being aware of the sharing of blood, tissue, and nutrients. In the poems of *Niño y sombras*, birth is not a just metaphor for the creative process or an event observed by an outsider, it is a lived experience described from the mother's perspective. Tragedy and loss are not distantly observed but felt in the maternal body. As Podnieks has explained, Méndez participates actively

in the "authoring of [her] own maternal" self by inscribing her body, blood, pain and joy in her poems (7). These poems offer to the reader a chance to look underneath the exterior mask and to take in the mother's first-hand thoughts, feelings, and physical experiences of motherhood. My study argues for the inclusion of female-centered and especially matrifocal texts that challenge the hegemony of the male subject in Spanish literature.

Introduction to Concha Méndez

Biographical Information

Concepción Josefa Pantaleona Méndez Cuesta was born July 27, 1898 in Madrid and died in Mexico City on December 28th, 1986 (Ulacia 26; *Diccionario* 239). Although her family was prosperous, her parents came from different regional and class backgrounds. According to her memoires, *Concha Méndez: Memorias habladas, memorias armadas* collected and edited by her granddaughter Paloma Ulacia Altolaguirre, Méndez's father was originally from Murcia and descended from an Italian bricklayer but became a successful builder and businessman in Madrid (25, 31). In contrast, her mother's family was aristocratic, of Galician and Castilian origins, but they lost their wealth due to financial mismanagement (25-26). As was typical of bourgeois families, Méndez and her nine younger brothers and sisters grew up in Madrid and spent the summers at the fashionable seaside towns of el Sardinero, Santander, and San Sebastian (26, 34). Her family background and experience would form multiple threads throughout her life: her desire for education and culture, her need for independence and freedom from familial restrictions and social expectations of

women, her passion for travel and adventure, and her drive to create. In fact, in Méndez's biography one can observe the emergence of a *mujer moderna*—a woman hungry for knowledge, an athlete, a woman who dared to travel alone, a writer, and an independent woman.

In her youth, Méndez lived the privileged yet restricted life of an upper-class young Spanish woman (Ulacia 31). As befitting the daughter of an upper-class family, Méndez was educated at the French school Santa Genoveva in Madrid from the age of seven to fourteen (27). In her memoirs, Méndez describes the education at the school as a preparation for the domestic sphere:

> A nosotras, las niñas, nos enseñaban en la escuela materias distintas a las que aprendían los niños; a ellos los preparaban para que después siguieran estudios superiores; nosotras, en cambio, recibíamos cursos de aseo, economía doméstica, labores manuales y otras cosas que nos harían pasar de colegiales a esposas, mujeres de sociedad, madres de familia. (27)

After she finished school at fourteen, Méndez's parents placed strict restrictions on her movements and on her participation in further education, including reading materials: "Mis padres no me dejaban coger un libro, ni siquiera el periódico" (28). In addition, when out of the house she was always chaperoned and expected to maintain appropriate appearance and display of her social class, such as wearing a hat and gloves: "En mi juventud, me tenían prohibido salir a la calle sin sombrero y sin guantes; era una distinción de clase" (29). Although Méndez's parents seemed to value her intelligence and abilities, as evidenced by the many years she served helping her father with correspondence and the writing of contracts, they were determined to keep her confined within the norms for her gender and class (31). In spite of the confines placed upon her by her social class and family expectations, Méndez would eventually develop both intellectual and physical independence from her family.

A limited education and restricted activities were not unusual for a young Spanish woman in the early 1900s. In Spanish society there was a prevailing belief in the different roles of men and women, a concern for the virtue of young women, and a lingering mistrust of formal education, especially coeducation, as Geraldine Scanlon notes in her seminal book *La polémica feminista en la España contemporánea 1868-1974* (Scanlon 15-37). Education for girls tended to focus on basic literacy, arithmetic, moral lessons, and practical skills that would prepare them for the domestic sphere—the home and children. In addition, girls from upper-class families often had access to additional private instruction in other disciplines like languages or music. As María Cruz Amo del Amo states in her article, "La educación de las mujeres en España," the purpose of educating girls was "convertirlas en eficaces ayudas del esposo, educadoras de los hijos y regeneradoras de la sociedad" (*Educación* 12). Even though there was growing support for education in general, and that of girls in particular, according to Geraldine Scanlon, in 1910 when Méndez was twelve years old, 65.8 percent of the women and 52.6 percent of the men in Spain were illiterate (50). Therefore, in spite of the limitations, Méndez achieved a higher level of education than most women in Spain of her time.

The push for reform in female education began to build in the nineteenth century with the 1857 Ley de Instrucción Pública (Ley Moyano), which required the provision of public primary education to girls as well as boys, and allowed the establishment of Normal Schools to train female teachers (Scanlon 17-18). Individuals like Concepción Arenal, Emilia Pardo Bazán, and Rosario de Acuña as well as Fernando de Castro, the Krausists, and the Asociación para la Enseñanza de la Mujer advocated for educational

reforms (Scanlon 25, 28-29, 31, 34; Acuña 24-36). In 1909, the education of boys and girls until the age of twelve became compulsory, and in 1910 women were allowed to freely enroll in Spanish universities (Amo 14). According to Amo, the number of women who studied at the university at this time remained small because of the considerable opposition to coeducation as well as "oposición familiar, la actitud hostil de profesores y compañeros, las dificultades sociales para el ejercicio profesional de los conocimientos adquiridos" (15). In particular, Méndez faced her family's opposition to any further education, and thus had to find other means to educate herself.

In spite of the restrictions imposed by her family and Spanish society, Méndez actively pursued learning and culture. In her memoires, Méndez states that she read in secret to satisfy her desire for literature: "para leer tenía que pedir libros prestados y ocultarlos en la cama" (Ulacia 40). In her twenties, Méndez faced stern family disapproval of further schooling. When she was twenty-five, Méndez attended a university lecture on geographic literature, but when she returned home, her mother struck her: "Mi madre hablaba por teléfono y me llamó: 'Venga usted aquí'. Al acercarme me dio con la bocina en la cabeza. Me dio porque se había enterado por un hermano de mi presencia en la universidad. Me abrió la sien y me salió un chorro de sangre; de golpe sentí que se me había ido Dios a quién sabe dónde" (45). Méndez concludes that even after reaching the legal age of twenty-five, the university was forbidden territory: "Ya era mayor de edad y pisar la universidad era imposible" (45). Eventually, and with difficulty, she was able to convince her parents to allow her greater freedom of movement and to work towards a degree to teach Spanish by taking classes at the Centro de Estudios Históricos in the late 1920s (Ulacia 45; "Exposición").

Méndez's pursuit of culture led her to become an active participant in the intellectual and cultural life of Madrid in the 1920s and 1930s. In addition to her surreptitious reading, she attended lectures and participated in tertulias (Resnick 133), and she was also one of the founding members of the Liceo Club Femenino of Madrid in 1926, an important cultural center for women (Miró 33; Ulacia 49). Her participation in the intellectual circles of Madrid is evidenced by her participation in the Lyceum Club and her connections with the most recognized authors and intellectuals of her time, such as Juan Ramón Jiménez, José Ortega y Gasset, and the young writers and artists who became known as the Generation or Group of 1927.

Méndez first came in contact with this group of writers indirectly through Luis Buñuel (Miró 33). Méndez and Buñuel maintained a seven-year courtship during which time he was a student at the Residencia de Estudiantes, but Buñuel refused to introduce her directly to his friends. (Ulacia 39-40). As Méndez states, "Él llevaba doble vida. Nunca nos reunimos juntos con los chicos de la Residencia de Estudiantes. La vida dividida entre los amigos y la novia era una costumbre de la época" (40). In defiance of this division of spheres, Méndez crossed those lines and initiated a friendship with Federico García Lorca (46).

Méndez's friendship with García Lorca opened up her world to poetry and led to other influential friendships in her life. García Lorca inspired her to write her own poetry, then, she met Rafael Alberti who became her literary mentor (Ulacia 46-47). Miró credits García Lorca and Alberti as being her primary literary influences (34). She also developed a close friendship with Maruja Mallo, then a student at the Escuela de San Fernando, who shared her rebelliousness regarding the social conventions of the

time (48, 51). Méndez served as Mallo's model for the "Ciclista" and other paintings (51, 53). In addition, Salvador Dalí was also a member of this circle of avant-garde friends (49). Méndez observes: "Todas estas personas que empezaba a encontrar, me abrían las puertas a una realidad que favorecía mi espíritu; de un solo salto entraba al medio artístico de mi tiempo: al mundo de los libros, a las referencias a los poetas antiguos que yo no había podido leer" (50). More importantly, this contact with the artistic world would inspire her to write and publish her own works.

Influenced by García Lorca, Alberti and their vanguardist tendencies, Méndez had her first collection of poetry *Inquietudes* printed in 1926 (Ulacia 54). Then in 1928, she issued her second collection *Surtidor*. In 1930 while in Buenos Aires, Argentina, she produced *Canciones de mar y tierra*, a response to the tutelage of her mentor, Alberti.

Méndez´s broadening education fueled her desire for physical and intellectual independence from her family. Scholars such as Resnick, Sánchez Martín, Miró, and Bellver have commented on Méndez's independence. Geraldine M. Scanlon explains the interconnection between education and independence, "la educación es probablemente la condición previa más importante para la emancipación" (15). Méndez's gradual process of emancipation began with her growing intellectual independence, and given her adventurous spirit, she soon sought physical independence from her family through travel.

Méndez's plans for emancipation from her restrictive family environment were frequently frustrated during her twenties. According to James Valender (scholar and husband to Paloma Ulacia Altolaguirre) in his article "Méndez escribe a Federico,"

Méndez supported "la causa de la mujer" (130). According to her letters, inspired by Ibsen, she fantasized of traveling to Scandinavia where attitudes towards women were more progressive than in Spain (136-141). Méndez states in her memoirs that she planned to run away to Sweden and made at least one failed attempt (Ulacia 47-48). From experience, Méndez concludes: "'La mujer debe liberarse a sí misma… Las leyes deben apoyarla pero es ella la que es responsable para su propia liberación'" (quoted in Resnick 131). In her early thirties, Méndez finally was able to claim her own freedom and independence. She emancipated herself from her family by taking two overseas trips alone. First, Méndez traveled to London in 1929 where she lived for several months, and then she traveled to Buenos Aires where she lived from December 1929 to June 1931 (Valender 130). Although she was in her early thirties when she took these trips, Méndez defied expectations for a woman of the Spanish bourgeoisie by traveling on her own and by earning her own living.

In January 1929, Méndez secretly left her parents' home and headed for England on a merchant ship "para emanciparme, trabajar y viajar" (Ulacia 59-60, 62). While in England, she earned her own living through translation and Spanish classes (Resnick 136-137). Her connections with the intellectual and literary world in Spain served her well during her time in England. In London, she stayed with Irene and César Falcón, the Peruvian writer, and did translation work for Espasa Calpe thanks to the help of Ortega y Gasset (Ulacia 62). She gave a presentation for the Anglo-Spanish Society and a lecture for the University of London on contemporary poetry of Spain (63-65). For the first time, Méndez was responsible for her own income and well-being, and she embraced the freedom and difficulties: "Fue el despertar en realidad: Emancipación.

Libertad. Lucha verdadera. Soledad muy sola… ahora comprendo mejor su intensidad" ("Los *raids* literarios" 47). These experiences reinforced her desire for travel and adventure, and a year and a half in Argentina would solidify Méndez's independence.

In December of 1929, Méndez traveled to Argentina aboard a boat full of Spanish emigrants arriving on Christmas Eve in Buenos Aires (67, 72). In her letter to León Sánchez Cuesta, Méndez reports that she supported herself by contributing to magazines and newspapers like *La Nación* ("Méndez escribe" 147-48, 130-31). In addition to her writing, she had a job working with her Spanish friend and writer Consuelo Berges to raise funds for a university residence in Madrid for Argentinian students (Ulacia 74). As in London, Méndez had extensive contact with the writers and intellectuals of Buenos Aires, including the artist and illustrator Norah Borges, the poet Guillermo de Torre (Norah Borges' husband), the poet Alfonsina Storni, and the Mexican ambassador Alfonso Reyes among others (Valender 131; Ulacia 73). While in Buenos Aires, Méndez worked on several plays and issued the poetry collection *Canciones de mar y tierra* in 1930 with a prologue by Consuelo Berges and illustrations by Norah Borges, and the assistance of Guillermo de Torre (Ulacia 76-77). Even though she had developed strong friendships in Buenos Aires and was briefly engaged to Fernando Ruffo, a photographer, Méndez felt pulled back to Spain as the political climate there changed (78). In 1931, Méndez left Argentina in order to participate in the Second Republic (81-82).

Upon returning to Madrid from Argentina via Paris, Méndez was introduced to Manuel Altolaguirre by García Lorca en la Granja del Henar (Ulacia 85). Soon after they met, she funded the purchase of a small hand-operated printing press and began to

work with Altolaguirre to print various works, including the literary magazine *Héroe* (87). By her own account, Méndez collaborated fully in the selection, editing, and physical work of issuing their various publications (87). Of the physically demanding operation of the printing press, she states: "Era yo quien la manejaba; la manejaba vestida con un mono azul de mecánico; era difícil y cansado pero como era deportista, tenía una fuerza increíble" (87). In 1932, together they published *Vida a vida*, Méndez's fourth collection of poetry. In spite of their joint printing venture, Méndez still hungered for adventure and considered emigrating to Guinea in Africa where she had been granted land by the Spanish government (85, 88). Spurred by her possible departure, Altolaguirre proposed marriage, but it took two attempts before Méndez agreed to marry him (88-89).

On July 5, 1932, Concha Cuesta Méndez married Manuel Altolaguirre in Madrid at the Chamberí church (Ulacia 89). Méndez reports that some of the most important writers of the Generation of 27 and other dignitaries were official witnesses to the religious ceremony: "Juan Ramón Jiménez, Luis Cernuda, Federico García Lorca, José Moreno Villa, Vicente Aleixandre, Jorge Guillén, el capitán Francisco Iglesias (héroe de la aviación española) y el embajador de Chile [Carlos Morla Lynch]" (90). The wedding solidified a romantic and printing partnership between Méndez and Altolaguirre, and both soon became the most important disseminators of the literary works of the Generation of 1927 in the pre-war period.

Altolaguirre and Méndez had two children together. Their first child, a son, died at birth in March of 1933 (Miró 42). The tragedy of losing a child to infant death was understandably difficult for the couple, and it inspired the collection of poems *Niño y*

sombras, which is the focus of this study. Méndez says about the birth of their first child:

> "Al año de casados tuvimos un niño, que murió al nacer, se hubiera llamado Juan. Manolo quiso hacerme creer que el niño vivía para que yo no sufriera; y entonces me encontraba en una angustia terrible: él que me decía que vivía, y la enfermera, que había muerto. Esa misma noche pedí que me trajeran papel y lápiz, y entonces escribí mi libro *Niño y sombras*. Todos los amigos se volcaron en el hospital para verme y Federico me llevó un manojo de poemas dedicados para que los publicáramos en la revista" (Ulacia 92).

Two years later on March 13, 1935, their daughter Paloma was born in London by cesarean section and was a healthy infant (Valender 21, Ulacia 95).

After the loss of their son in 1933, the couple moved to London for two years where they continued their literary collaboration. Altolaguirre had been given a scholarship to study there by the "Junta para Ampliación de Estudios" (Ulacia 94). There they produced the literary magazine *1616* with Spanish and English poetry, and Méndez wrote *El carbón y la rosa*, a work of children's theatre which was printed later in Madrid in 1935 (95). The couple and their new daughter returned to Madrid in 1935. Altolaguirre and Méndez soon began editing the magazine *Caballo verde para la poesía* directed by Pablo Neruda. During this time they also issued *Primeras canciones* by García Lorca, *Primeros poemas de amor* by Neruda, *El rayo que no cesa* by Miguel Hernández, and *La realidad y el deseo* by Luis Cernuda. Just a few months before the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, they completed the printing of Méndez's own collection *Niño y sombras* on May 16, 1936 (97).

Once the Spanish Civil War began in July of 1936, Méndez and Altolaguirre faced many losses—their home, their friends and family, and the Republic. After bombs began falling on Madrid, Méndez and their daughter Paloma fled to Barcelona with the wife and daughter of Neruda (Ulacia 101). Altolaguirre joined the Republicans

and served in a variety of roles, including as a writer and with the theater troupe "La Barraca" (Ulacia 101). Méndez and Paloma spent time in Barcelona, Valencia, France, England, and Belgium (101-103). The family was reunited in Cataluña for a time, and Méndez worked typing news reports on the war destined for other countries (104).

In 1939 at the close of the war, Méndez, Paloma, and Altolaguirre fled to France amidst horrific conditions and bombings (105-106). Upon crossing the border into France, the family became separated. Altolaguirre sent Méndez and Paloma on ahead with Belgium diplomats, but even so in France they barely escaped being rounded up and sent to internment camps with other Spanish refugees, saved by Méndez's ability to speak French and her fur coat (106). After crossing the border on foot, Altolaguirre spent a short time in a French concentration camp where he suffered a mental breakdown (106). Once reunited in Paris, the traumatized family took shelter in the home of the poet Paul Eluard (108-9). In 1939, with financial help from Pablo Picasso and friends, the family was able to leave France by boat headed towards Mexico (109).

Instead of landing in Mexico as planned, the Altolaguirre-Méndez family spent four years in Havana, Cuba. They were forced to disembark in Havana because Paloma fell ill with measles on the ship (109). In Cuba, Altolaguirre and Méndez finally returned to their writing and printing business. They edited the book series *El ciervo herido* and the weekly magazine *La Verónica* (Ulacia 110). Unfortunately, Méndez's accustomed role in the administration of their business was limited by the attitudes of the Cuban printers (Ulacia 114). They socialized with Cuban artists and writers like Alejo Carpentier, Lezama Lima, Carlos Enríquez, and Wifredo Lam and assisted other Spanish refugees (111). In Cuba, Méndez produced an anthology *Lluvias enlazadas*

(1939) with a prologue by Juan Ramón Jiménez. Also while in Cuba, Méndez had a close friendship with philosopher María Zambrano and Lydia Cabrera, the poet and short story writer (113).

In 1943, the family left Havana for Mexico City by plane where they would live out the rest of their lives (Ulacia 115). After a year in Mexico, Altolaguirre and Méndez separated on account of his on-going affair with María Luisa Gómez Mena, whom they had met in Cuba (Ulacia 121). In his article "María Luisa Gómez Mena: la mecenas olvidada del arte cubano," José Ramón Alonso Lorea confirms that she was an influential patron of the arts. Even with the separation, Altolaguirre would come in and out of Méndez's life until his death in 1959 (Ulacia 122-3). Eventually, Méndez and Paloma moved to Coayacán where they lived in a small family compound with two dwellings, one for Paloma and her family, and another for Méndez (130). Their close family friend, Luis Cernuda, also lived there off and on from 1952 until his death in 1963 (132). On July 27, 1959, Altolaguirre and Gómez Mena died in an auto accident after showing his film *El cantar de los cantares* at the San Sebastián film festival (134). Méndez returned to Spain three times in her seventies to visit her family (138-142). The Residencia de Estudiantes' *Exposición virtual de Manuel Altolaguirre y Concha Méndez: Poetas e impresores* indicates that Méndez died at home on December 28, 1986 in Coyoacán.

Body of Work

Concha Méndez is now considered to be one of a number of women writers who were integral to the Generation of '27. In addition to the male writers, such as Federico García Lorca, Luis Cernuda, Rafael Alberti, Dámaso Alonso, and Manuel Altolaguirre,

scholars like Emilio Miró and Catherine Bellver argue for the inclusion of female writers including Concha Méndez, Ernestina de Champourcín, Josefina de la Torre, Rosa Chacel, and Carmen Conde. Catherine Bellver refers to these writers as "the female contemporaries of the Generation of 27" ("Hands" 319). Like the works of her contemporaries, Méndez's writing reflects the literary influences of her time—the legacy of the Generation of 1898 writers like Antonio Machado and Juan Ramón Jiménez, the vanguardist preference for the image and modernizing tendencies, and a shift from external to more intimate themes.

Most scholars divide Concha Méndez's poetic production into three periods: 1926-1930, 1931-1936, and 1939-1986. Three sources provide excellent publication information about Méndez's literary works. The first source is her memoir, *Concha Méndez: memorias habladas, memorias armadas*, which contains her memories recounted orally to her granddaughter, Paloma Ulacia Altolaguirre, and then transcribed, organized, and edited by Ulacia Altolaguirre. The second is the *Exposición virtual de Manuel Altolaguirre y Concha Méndez: Poetas e impresores* which was originally a physical exhibition put on by the Residencia de Estudiantes and commissioned by James Valender and has a thorough bibliography ("Créditos" *Exposición*). The third and most detailed source is the "Bibliografía de Concha Méndez" in *Una mujer moderna: Concha Méndez en su mundo (1898-1986)*, which was prefaced by James Valender and has a comprehensive list of her published and unpublished writings.

The first period, 1926-1930, corresponds to Méndez's independent printing of three collections of poetry which show the influence of Lorca, Alberti and vanguardist

tendencies. In 1926, Méndez produced in Madrid her first collection of poetry *Inquietudes* and her second collection *Surtidor* in 1928 (Ulacia 54). In addition, she published a short screenplay, *Historia de un taxi*, in 1927 ("Bibliografía de Concha Méndez" 245). While living in Buenos Aires in 1930, she issued *Canciones de mar y tierra* which shows significant influence from Rafael Alberti (Miró 37).

During her first period, Méndez's vanguardist poetry reflects ultraist influences and other strains of high modernism. Like her contemporaries Lorca and Alberti, traditional or popular poetic forms became the vehicle for making modern art from the lived experiences of the world around them. According to Miró, Méndez's early style in *Inquietudes* and *Surtidor* was dominated by "Romances, cuartetas, coplas, alguna soleá" with mainly octasyllabic and heptasyllabic verses with assonant rhyme, and her occasional poem of *alejandrino* type reveal "ecos inequívocos de su progenie modernista" (37). According to Bellver, Méndez exhibits in her early poetry the vanguardist fascination with "the visual and sonorous potential of words" as well as the importance of "the image as the primordial ingredient of poetry" with a "strong sense of materiality within the confines of their poetic world" (*Absence* 13). Resnick notes the ultraist themes in *Inquietudes* with its images and references to modern technology and the continued influence of ultraism in *Surtidor* (134-5). Méndez acknowledges the influence of the modern age on her poetry: "Yo he visto nacer todos los inventos del siglo. Nací en medio de la modernidad, del canto a los medios de transporte, a la velocidad, al vuelo" (Ulacia 29). Sánchez Martín remarks on the exuberance of Méndez's early poetry: "Lo más admirable de este corpus poético de juventud es el afán estético de la autora por convertir en materia poética una realidad vital que experimentó

intensamente" (891). Méndez's poetry shifts from the vanguardist focus on the exterior modern world to more intimate themes in her second period.

Méndez's second period is from 1931-1936 when she returned to Madrid from Argentina and began her relationship with Manuel Altolaguirre until the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. In 1931, she published two plays, *El ángel cartero* and *El personaje presentido* ("Bibliografía de Concha Méndez" 244). In 1932 in the newly established Méndez-Altolaguirre workshop, Méndez issued her fourth collection of poetry *Vida a vida* with a prologue by Juan Ramón Jiménez as a part of the series La Tentativa Poética ("Bibliografía de Concha Méndez" 243). According to Miró, in *Vida a vida*, Méndez uses "acentos y tonos nuevos, una voz más depurada y personal" as the poems reflect on her romance with Manuel Altolaguirre with a modern eroticism and explore an existential theme with "soledad y desolación" (41). In 1935, Méndez and Altolaguirre published Pablo Neruda's "Sobre una poesía impura" in the first edition of *Caballo verde para la poesía*, and Gregory Cole notes the influence of Neruda's *poesía impura* in Méndez's expression of human sorrow and concern for humanity in her subsequent poetry (129, 133). Just prior to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Méndez printed her fifth collection *Niño y sombras* in the Méndez-Altolaguirre workshop set up in their home in May of 1936 (Miró 43). Miró regards *Niño y sombras*, prompted by her suffering the loss of her first child to stillbirth, as the beginning of Méndez's mature writing, and he notes that two significant leit-motifs in her poetry—shadows and dreams—gain prominence in this collection (42). According to Sánchez Martín, in this period Méndez develops greater maturity and individuality as a poet: "es a partir de *Vida a vida* y *Niño y sombras* cuando la poeta alcanza su voz más

auténtica" (891). Then in 1938, Méndez was able to put in print "Nacimiento," the first part of her dramatic trilogy *El solitario,* in the short-lived literary magazine *Hora de España* (*Exposición*). "Nacimiento" was the only work Méndez published during the Spanish Civil War because the war's complete disruption of their lives interrupted Méndez's literary activities and trajectory.

Méndez's third period begins with the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 and her subsequent exile and continues to her death in 1986. The poets who left Spain for exile lost not only their homes, possessions, family members, and friends, they also lost the dynamic community of fellow artists that supported and invigorated the artistic production of the twenties and thirties in Spain. Despite these difficulties and like many other Spanish emigres, Méndez and Altolaguirre tried to continue their productivity in exile, first in Cuba, and later in Mexico.

In Cuba, Méndez produced the poetry anthology *Lluvias enlazadas* (1939) with a prologue by Juan Ramón Jiménez ("Bibliografía de Concha Méndez" 243). She also published "Amor" the second part of the theatrical trilogy *El solitario* in 1941 with a prologue by María Zambrano, the philosopher ("Bibliografía de Concha Méndez" 244). In addition, she wrote the play *La caña y el tabaco* which was unpublished until 2011 ("Bibliografía de Concha Méndez" 244).

In Mexico, Méndez issued *Poemas. Sombras y sueños* (1944) and *Villancicos de Navidad* (1944) with the publishing arm of the literary magazine *Rueca* ("Bibliografía de Concha Méndez" 243). She also printed "Amor" in 1944 and "Soledad" in 1945, two of three parts of *El solitario*, with the first part being "Nacimiento" from 1938 (*Exposición*). A selection of her poetry was issued as *Antología poética* in 1976, and

Vida a vida y Vida o río was published in 1979 ("Bibliografía de Concha Méndez"243-44). Finally, *Entre el soñar y el vivir* was produced in 1981, and the collection *Poemas: 1926-1886* was issued in 1995 ("Bibliografía de Concha Méndez" 244).

Méndez wrote two collections of poetry that include poems about children and motherhood, *Niño y sombras* (1936) and *Poemas. Sombras y sueños* (1944). Unlike the later collection, the primary focus of *Niño y sombras* is the poet's experience of pregnancy, birth, and the loss of her son. As a whole, the collection serves as an elegy for Méndez's stillborn son (Miró 42).

Niño y sombras is composed of twenty-eight poems, all of which are numbered, but Méndez gave titles to only nine of the poems. The collection concludes with a colophon that states: "Se acabó de imprimir en los talleres de Manuel Altolaguirre y Concha Méndez, Viriato, 73, Madrid, el 16 de mayo, 1936. The typesetting does include some irregularities, particularly with the use or absence of accents. For example, interrogative words do not always carry an accent mark, and some words carry an accent that now would not because of the discarded practice of accenting words such as *fué*. Because this does not cause confusion in meaning in most instances, I have chosen to represent the orthography as it is in the original text. When possible, I have consulted a later edition of the poem in order to clarify meaning, and I indicate this with a footnote.

The first seven poems of *Niño y sombras* refer directly to the child and to the maternal experience. These poems have in common an emphasis on the centrality of the child, the interconnections between the mother and child, images of absence and emptiness, expressions of grief and loss, and declarations of enduring maternal memory.

The following twenty-one poems of the collection reveal the poet's process of mourning, her battles with depression, and her increasing awareness of humanity's precarious situation. Throughout the poems, Méndez struggles with maintaining a maternal identity that depends on memory and dreams since she has no living child to hold and show to the world.

Chapter Overview

Chapter II, "Theoretical Foundations: Identity, Subjectivity, and Feminism," explores the philosophical issues in conceiving of a maternal self who is a creative subject, and it discusses different influences on Spanish Feminism, including theories of sexual difference. Chapter III, "The Embodied and Relational Maternal Identity in Niño y sombras" analyzes the poems of *Niño y sombras* to reveal Méndez's conception of an embodied and relational maternal identity and examines the poet's assertions of an enduring maternal identity and relationship with the child in spite of his death. Chapter IV, "Grief and the Effects of Perinatal Death on the Maternal Identity" analyzes the expressions of grief and loss in the poems of *Niño y sombras* and follows the effects of perinatal death on the maternal identity through the poems as the mother's sense of her identity adapts to the changes and she moves through her grief process. Chapter V, "The Maternal, Creative Subject" considers how Méndez asserts her maternal subjectivity through her poetry in *Niño y sombras* and specifically in Poem 26, "Yo sé." In my analysis of the poems of *Niño y sombras*, I take a matrifocal perspective to explore how the mother-poet expresses her maternal identity, how that maternal identity is affected by death and her grief process, and finally how she asserts herself as a

maternal subject, using language to create meaning and communicate her maternal experience.

Chapter II: Theoretical Foundations: Identity, Subjectivity, and Feminism

Introduction

In order to provide a theoretical foundation for the maternal identity and poetic subjectivity expressed in the writings on motherhood by Concha Méndez, this chapter explores ways to conceptualize a maternal self who is a creative subject. The long-standing philosophical debate over the definitions of identity and subjectivity creates challenges to the concept of the maternal self and creative subject because there is so little written on the topic. The two most prominent sides to this debate within Western philosophical thought are the Aristotelian concept of a stable and constant identity and the postmodern theory of a constructed and changeable identity. Neither side adequately provides space for an embodied female self, a maternal self, or a maternal creative subject. Although the concepts of a maternal identity and a maternal creative subject appear to be topics for feminist inquiry, some feminist and psychological theories do not support these concepts. Furthermore, critics have often devalued the aesthetic contributions of poetry about motherhood. Within the triad of Aristotelian metaphysics, postmodernism, and feminism, prominent theoretical positions on identity and subjectivity fail to validate a maternal embodied identity, shun any suggestion of essentialism, and dismiss the maternal creative subject and her cultural works. However, several feminist philosophers and thinkers offer theoretical alternatives that bridge the triad and establish the space necessary to conceive of an embodied, relational, dynamic, and adaptable maternal identity and a maternal creative subject.

So as to conceptualize a maternal self who is a creative subject, this chapter explores the theoretical questions raised when these concepts of identity and

subjectivity intersect with the maternal and aesthetics. Beyond the present introduction, this chapter is divided into three sections: The Self and Identity, The Subject and Subjectivity, and Feminist Influences and Perspectives in the Spanish Context. In the Self and Identity section, I explain the Aristotelian and postmodern theories of identity and how they impact the reception of the concept of maternal identity. In addition, I address how these concepts of identity feed the essentialism controversy in feminism and its influence on the reception of maternal texts and related scholarly efforts. In the Subject and Subjectivity section, I examine several definitions of the subject and subjectivity and their relationship to identity, and I present a viable theory of maternal identity and subjectivity. In the Feminist Influences and Perspectives in the Spanish Context section, I discuss the variety of influences on Spanish Feminism and the impact of the French and Italian theorists of sexual difference.

My analysis of the poetry of Méndez in the following chapters has been shaped by my theoretical research into identity, subjectivity, and grief. Regarding the self and identity, in this study, I explore a middle path between the traditional concept of an inherent, stable, and rational identity that comes out of the Aristotelian and Cartesian traditions and the fragmented and constructed identity coming out of postmodern theory. Many feminist scholars approach identity from the social constructivist perspective and eschew any mention of identity that is not exclusively constructed. Whereas, this middle path conceives of identity as, at least in part, persistent through time but also influenced by one's corporality, exterior social forces, and roles. From my perspective, both nature and nurture are at play in the development of individual identity. In my analysis, I will be applying four premises which have emerged from my

research. These premises are the embodied, relational, dynamic, and adaptable maternal identity; the mother as a creative subject; the aesthetic value of her creative works; and that these premises are compatible with feminism.

First, I assert that maternal identity is embodied, relational, dynamic, and adaptable, based in part on Christine Battersby's theories presented in *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity*. By means of this concept of a maternal identity that it is not fixed nor constant, I espouse a metaphysics of "'becoming', rather than 'being'" (Battersby 7). Battersby contends that the female self does not exist independent of the female body, and therefore it is logical to claim that maternal identity is also embodied because the maternal self exists within the woman's physical body and is inextricably connected to it (39). A biological mother's maternal identity is formed in relationship with her body from the moment she discovers she is pregnant, and it develops along with the pregnancy and the fetus. The fetus in the womb is at once a part of the woman's body and a nascent separate self. Therefore, the mother contains within herself the Other, her child. Even after giving birth, the mother is tied physically and emotionally to the baby through lactation, care, and the mother-child relationship. Consequentially, because the mother's identity exists in relationship to the child, the maternal identity is relational and not autonomous.

This maternal identity continues to develop, grow, and change throughout the mother-child relationship into adulthood and even in the case of the child's death. The way a woman conceives of herself as a mother to an infant will be different than her identity as a mother of a teenager or as a grown adult. Therefore, identity changes over time and is dynamic rather than static. A dynamic identity is also adaptable, and the

maternal identity adapts to the mother's circumstances and experiences. These circumstances are the particulars of class, race and ethnicity, nation and region, religion, profession, education, etc. of each woman, and experience refers to the specifics of each woman's individual experiences. It is logical that a Western woman who has a professional career may conceive of her maternal identity differently than a Western woman who works within the domestic sphere. In addition, the mother's identity adapts to her experiences with the child and to the child's behavior and health as well as her own. The maternal identity also builds upon and intersects with her other identities, i.e. her concept of herself as a woman, a daughter, a wife, a Spaniard, a Madrileña, a poet, etc. Hence, her maternal identity may be in alignment with some of her identities and in conflict with others.

Second, mothers are subjects who speak, act, decide, write, and create. The mother-poet is a creative subject who takes her maternal lived experience and uses language to translate that experience into poetry. In this way, she creates her own subjectivity and a female embodied reality. Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Diana O'Hehir in *Mothersongs: Poems for, by, and about Mothers* state that "Although maternity has been celebrated and consecrated for centuries, and although as primary caretakers mothers have always helped shape civilization, poets have just in the last few decades begun to speak *as* mothers and *about* mothers with unprecedented complexity, intensity, and subtlety" (17). Méndez writes poetry expressing her identity and giving voice to her experiences of pregnancy, birth, motherhood, and loss.

Third, maternal poetry has aesthetic value and the potential to be important, beautiful, and reflective of the human condition. This is a revolutionary claim in part

because of the emphasis in Western aesthetics on the universal. Aristotle in his *Poetics* distinguished between poetry and history saying, "poetry is a more philosophical and serious business than history for poetry speaks more of universals, history of particulars" (33). This has influenced the view that poetry, and in extension all of literature, must deal with universal themes in order to be considered valid and beautiful. Therefore, the particular has not been judged for having as high of an aesthetic value as the universal. If the writer writes from her personal experiences, the writing shifts towards the "particular" of history, biography, or autobiography. Women poets who write about motherhood are writing from the particular, from their lived experience, and unfortunately these poems have been dismissed or undervalued because they have been judged to be too sentimental, domestic, intimate, and autobiographical, and therefore not universal. The poet Jill Bialowsky reflects on the lack of poems of motherhood in the canon and on the labeling of those that exist as domestic poetry: "As if private lives, birth, the dialogue of human suffering were less important than poems of war and meditations of nationhood … And yet some of the most powerful poems of human experiences are poems about love and death, themes inherent in the relationship between a mother and a child" (180). It is my aim in this dissertation to demonstrate how Concha Méndez's poetry, "bear[s] witness to the many ways in which the powers, pains, and pleasures of maternity can be transformed into powerful art" (*Mothersongs* 22).

Fourth, the first three premises are compatible with and can be supported by feminist thought. In *Feminism is for everybody*, Bell Hooks defines feminism as "'a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression'" (viii). By reconceiving

maternal identity as embodied, relational, dynamic, and adaptable, the first premise seeks to correct philosophical constructs of identity that have excluded women and mothers from claiming selfhood and therefore subjectivity. The second premise recognizes women as subjects with their own agency and as producers of artistic works. The third asserts an argument for recognizing, valuing, and celebrating women's cultural production. At the root of these premises is the supposition that women are equally valuable members of the human race, their diverse life experiences are important to our understanding of the human condition, and through pregnancy and birth, women have a unique perspective on the creation of new life.

Yet, not all feminists are comfortable with conceptions of identity and subjectivity that directly acknowledge female embodiment and motherhood. Unfortunately, the feminist social project to disconnect women's identities from their reproductive function has led some feminists to marginalize women who identify with their female bodies and the potential for motherhood. This marginalization of female-identified women and motherhood has extended to their cultural production as well. Even though my project could also be marginalized because it is studying women poets' cultural production that is in direct relationship to their reproductive function, I view this as a project of feminist thought and activism.

While these premises may appear to be commonsense to some, the definitions of the self and identity, the subject and subjectivity are part of a long-standing and complex debate among philosophers and theorists. The underlying theories that support the concepts of a maternal identity, a creative maternal subject, and the aesthetic value of maternal poetry run counter to Western philosophical and aesthetic thought, some

feminist theories, and some philosophical and psychological concepts of the self and identity and of the subject and subjectivity.

The Self and Identity

Brief introduction to Aristotelian Metaphysics

The following section on "The Self and Identity" focuses on distinguishing between two different definitions of identity—the Aristotelian (sameness) and the postmodern (difference). These definitions provide the foundation for the subsequent discussions in this chapter. This section also outlines the influence of binary oppositions in how we conceive of male and female identities. In addition, there is a discussion of the concept of essence, its definition within feminism, and the resulting controversy that surrounds essentialism within feminism.

From the Aristotelian perspective, each individual, assumed to be male, has an essential, autonomous, and persistent self that forms the core for his identity. For instance, when one asks the question "who are you?" it is to elicit a sense of who that person is on a deeper level. In other words, the inquirer wants to understand the core of the person. This core is the sameness or the thread of identity consistent throughout someone's life even when circumstances change. The understanding of the self as one's inherent nature is based on Aristotle's ontological writings, principally the *Metaphysics*. In "Book VII" of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle expounds upon his theory of "substance" which is "the essence of the very nature of a thing" (VII.4, 1029b4, trans. McMahon). As Battersby clarifies, Aristotle's ontology focuses on "the study of a 'primary' and separable substance or 'being' that is fundamental, non-relational and that remains

constant through change" (*Phenomenal Woman* 5). Thus, the Aristotelian concept of the self is derived from this idea of a core substance that is inherent, independent of others, and persistent.

In this Aristotelian concept, the self is envisioned to be male, while the female is seen as an imperfect or defective male. In the discussion of substance in "Book VII" of the *Metaphysics,* Aristotle continually refers to man but rarely to woman, except to claim that in reproduction woman originates from man (VII.9, 1034b5, trans. McMahon). Consequently, he leaves woman out of the discussion of substance and the self. Aristotle's positioning of man and the male of the species as his primary referent is comparable to his establishment of the male as the norm in his biological writings.

In his biological treatises, Aristotle details the contributions of male and female animals in the conception of offspring and characterizes the female by her deficiency in comparison to the male. When discussing the human reproduction in *De Generatione Animalium I,* Aristotle concludes: "In appearance too a boy is like a woman, and the woman is as it were an infertile male; for the female exists in virtue of a particular incapacity, in being unable to concoct seed out of the nutriment in its last stage … owing to the coldness of her nature" (728a.17-22, trans. Balme). This description characterizes the woman as an immature or undeveloped male human with the inability to complete the process of producing fertile semen, which he later indicates is the origin of the soul. In *De Generatione Animalium II,* Aristotle refers to all female animals as deficient: "For the female is as it were a male deformed, and the menses are seed but not pure seed; for it lacks one thing only, the source of the soul" (III, 737a27-30, trans. Balme). Thus, the female is defined by her menstrual fluid's lack of the ingredient

necessary to produce new life, "the source of the soul." Battersby explains Aristotle's theory of the formation of females as "failed and botched males who, through lack of heat during conception and the subsequent period of foetal growth, failed to develop their full potential as members of that species" (*Phenomenal Woman* 26). Rhoda Hadassah Kotzin adds that males are equated with gestational success while any female born is "a deformity or failure … a deficient or defective male" (Kotzin 18). In Aristotle's biological writings, males are defined "by what they have and females by what they lack" (Kotzin 18). For while the female is necessary in the generation of new life, Aristotle establishes the male of the species as the norm and the female as incomplete, immature, or deficient in comparison.

Aristotle's establishment of the male as the norm for the human species has far-reaching implications beyond biological theories. Philosophically, it has influenced how we think about gender and identity because it positions man's selfhood or identity as the norm. And since woman's selfhood or identity is measured against the man's, she is defined in comparison to him. Robin Schott explains that "The growth of philosophical feminism is a response to the history of philosophical sexism, which has identified 'human' by a masculine model and defined the feminine only in relation to the masculine" (40). Battersby also considers this comparison problematic in how it influences the overarching feminist project to recognize women as equal human beings:

> it is no good simply demanding that women are treated as, and referred to as 'persons' if it turns out that our very concept of a person is itself gendered; if it turns out that we understand what it is to be a person or a self only by normalizing the mind/body relationship that marks males in our culture; and if it, also, turns out that this model of the mind/body relationship generates an inadequate ideal—even for men. (*Phenomenal Woman* 18)

Battersby contends that the idea of selfhood is gendered male and based on an idealized relationship between the mind and body that not only excludes women, it isn't even inclusive of all men. The idea of the inherent, autonomous, persistent, rational self is associated with a male mind/body relationship in which the self is connected with the mind and considered separate from the body. According Battersby, a woman's humanness is thought to be less fully developed in part because women have a mind/body relationship that does not allow for the self to be separate from the body. In order to further understand the self in relationship with the body and the historic conceptions of male and femaleness, it is necessary to briefly explore the philosophical legacy of binary oppositions.

Binary Oppositions:

Binary oppositions have a long, influential history in Western culture and have played an important role in forming the concept of the inherent, autonomous, persistent, rational self. Binary oppositions such as mind/body, reason/emotion, culture/nature, and public/private associate the male with the privileged side of the binary and the female with the disadvantaged side. In these dichotomies, man is associated with the highly valued aspects of mind, reason, culture, and the public sphere while woman is associated with the less valued aspects of body, emotion, nature, and the private sphere. This has led to the argument that the male self is situated in the mind and capable of reason because of its separation from the body and emotion. Thus, the male self is able to use and understand rational thought, produce cultural works, and function within the public sphere.

In contrast, the female self is thought of as being anchored to the body, ruled by emotion, linked to nature through her body, and therefore more restricted to the private or domestic sphere. Womanhood or femaleness is strongly associated with the body, especially a menstruating and potentially fertile, pregnant, or lactating female body. Because of the female self's association with the body, women are thought to be ruled by emotions rather than by reason. The woman is also linked to nature both in its splendor and fecundity and in its brutality. The various phases of women's bodily development, menses, pregnancy, birth, and lactation, as well as women's role in the ongoing care of children as well as other family members traditionally have limited them to the domestic sphere and reduced their contribution to culture. These associations have made it harder for thinkers to envision woman, especially the mother, as having a self and an identity as a thinking, rational being which is capable of producing a cultural product of value.

Rhoda Hadassah Kotzin credits the beginning of the pervasive influence of these binaries to Aristotle's discussion of the ten Pythagorean binary pairs in the *Metaphysics* (12). In the "Table of Opposites," Aristotle presents what he calls the "first principles" of the Pythagoreans: "Bound/Infinity, Odd/Even, Unity/Plurality, Right/Left, Male/Female, Rest/Motion, Straight/Crooked, Light/Darkness, Good/Bad, Square/Oblong" (Arist. *Met.* I.5, 986a). According to Kotzin, while six of these sets of terms refer to mathematical or cosmological concepts, the remaining four represent "associations of the male with right, light, and good, and of the female with left, darkness, and evil" (12). Kotzin explains that although these binary pairs were widespread "among prephilosophical Greeks and people in many other cultures as

well," their inclusion in the *Metaphysics* has had a lasting impact on Western notions about gender (12).

Furthermore, the seventeenth century philosopher, René Descartes has been instrumental in the Western conception of the rational, autonomous, essential self and in the separation of the mind from the body. According to Moira Gatens in her article on "Modern rationalism," "Feminist philosophers generally agree that Descartes' philosophy has had profound effects on contemporary philosophical conceptions of women" (21). Gatens explains that while Descartes viewed the body as "an epistemologically neutral machine," he maintained that "the essential self … is the autonomous *res cogitans* (thinking thing)" and the "rational subject [is tied] to a disembodied self" (Gatens 22). In other words, the body is simply the container of a disembodied, autonomous, and thinking self. In "Part IV" of *Discourse on Method*, after his famous declaration of 'I think, therefore I am," Descartes states

> From that I knew that I was a substance the whole essence or nature of which is to think, and that for its existence there is no need of any place, nor does it depend on any material thing; so that this 'me,' that is to say, the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body, and is even more easy to know than is the latter; and even if the body were not, the soul would not cease to be what it is. (247)

In saying that this thinking, essential substance or soul exists independently from the body or any material container, Descartes effectively divorces the mind from the body. He views the soul to be inherent, persistent, autonomous from the body, knowable, and eternal. For Descartes, to be rational and to gain understanding and knowledge, one must "detach one's essential self (the mind) from the body and its passions. It is this notion of detaching oneself from one's embodiment that has been identified as one of the prime means through which women have been excluded from the Cartesian ideal of

reason" (Gatens 22). This separation of the rational mind from the body has negative implications for how women's capacity for reason has been perceived.

Both Aristotle and Descartes differentiated between men and women's access to reason. While Aristotle thought women capable of reasoning but without the same level of authority as men, Descartes viewed women as having the same ability to reason as man but less able to detach themselves from their irrational bodies. Many feminist philosophers conclude that Aristotle viewed women as being less rational from two passages in the *Politics*. In the first passage, Aristotle observes that "the male is by nature fitter for command than the female" and that this "inequality is permanent" (I.12, 1259a 1-5, 8-10, trans. Jowett). In the following discussion about the amount of "deliberative faculty" held by various members of society, Aristotle states: "For the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has, but it is immature" (I.13, 1260a 13-15, trans. Jowett). Consequently, Kotzin asserts that Aristotle viewed women as human and therefore able to reason, but "to be woman is to have a chronic and incurable inability to make decisions and carry them out is to say that a woman as a woman does not have a full measure of rationality" (19). From this perspective, women's capacity for reason, that is to deliberate and make rational decisions, is diminished by their lack of authority or power.

Descartes favors an opposition between the rational mind and the irrational body (Gatens 23). Gatens states regarding Descartes, "Whereas previously, women were conceived on a continuum of rationality—as less rational than men—they now come to be conceived as having souls or minds identical to men. Sexual difference is thus located in bodily difference" (23). For Descartes, although women are theoretically

identical to men in their capacity for rationality, they are more closely associated with the body and less likely to transcend it, and in addition, they are less likely to have the time and means to cultivate the Cartesian rational method (23). The legacy of these binary oppositions of mind and body, culture and nature, rational and emotional can be traced through the ideas and writings of other philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Jean-Jacques Rousseau who continued to associate men with the mind, rational thought, and the production and appreciations of culture, and women with the body, emotions, and nature.

The Self and Identity: Postmodern Identity

While the notion of sameness allows us to conceptualize a stable, constant self, the idea of difference challenges that stability and constancy. The question "Who are you?" is often answered with a recounting of the myriad details that all contribute to form one's identity, for example: origin, gender, lifetime experiences, family, profession, class, membership in groups, etc. These details are the "what" of person or the set of characteristics, societal roles, and memberships a person may hold. The combined elements of a person's self will change throughout his or her life, they may or may not be integrated, and they are influenced by internal and external forces. As W. Michael Mudrovic in his introduction to *Mirror, Mirror on the Page: Identity and Subjectivity in Spanish Women's Poetry* observes, "Identity is the comprehension and affirmation—however tentative, transitory, and partial … of who one is at a given time and in a given place" (18). These changeable combinations and intersections of characteristics, roles, experiences, moments, places, and circumstances create a sense of difference between individuals and within aspects of an individual's identity.

Postmodern thinkers have questioned the idea of a stable, constant identity and have proposed that the self is in fact fragmented, constructed and performative. For Chris Weedon in "Subjectivity and Identity," identities are adopted from within ideologies in our contexts, and she states: "Identities may be socially, culturally and institutionally assigned, as in the case, for instance, of gender or citizenship" (6). These assigned identities are fostered and maintained through "social and cultural practices" and by social institutions (6). Individuals also incorporate these assigned identities, and with a nod to Judith Butler's theory of performativity, Weedon states that identities are "cultural acquired through repetition" and when internalized "become part of lived subjectivity" (6-7). Individuals may also make a conscious choice to select some identities, i.e. affiliations with organizations, which may allow the individual to choose an identity that may run counter to those "institutionally and socially assigned" (7). Finally, Weedon explains that "Identity is perhaps best understood as a limited and temporary fixing for the individual of a particular mode of subjectivity" (Weedon 19). So according to Weedon, individuals have multiple identities, some of which are externally assigned and others are chosen, and these identities are not constant but rather temporary. Therefore, the individual experiences more difference in his or her identities than sameness, and within the self at any moment, the individual is performing several different identities, i.e. both mother and wife.

The Self and Identity: Essence

The conflict between the concepts of identity based on difference and "sameness" can be explored through the concept of essence. Whereas we can trace the idea of essence back to Aristotle, both essence and essentialism have been a matter of

intense debate among feminists. These terms are often mentioned in feminist writing without specifying how they have been used in philosophy (Battersby 25). The English term essence is derived from the Latin translation of the Greek phrase "to ti ên einai" or "the what it is to be" (25). According to Battersby, "For Aristotle, the essence of a thing is linked to its 'substance' or 'being' (*ousia*), and to the timeless and necessary element in the species or genus which persists across change" (25). Aristotle in "Book VII" of the *Metaphysics* writes: "For whatsoever is the very nature of a thing is the essence of that thing," and "[t]he very nature of a thing will not, accordingly, be found in any of those things that are not the species of a genus, but in these only" (1030a). Therefore, Aristotelian essence is that sameness that allows us to group individuals together in their species, without regard to their biological sex (Battersby 25-26).

In Aristotle's "metaphysical biology" he classified individuals into species according to their shared essence (Battersby 26). From this standpoint, all humans share a "universal essence" which is "what all members of the species have in common … even if this essence is not always manifested completely (Battersby 26). As noted before, Aristotle viewed the females of any species as incomplete and malformed males of the species. Accordingly, in Aristotelian ontology, women are human because they have "the minimal characteristics, or essence, of the human" but are still not full manifestations of the species (Battersby 26). Thus, from the Aristotelian perspective, human females do not have their own essence, rather women and men share the human essence which is most fully expressed in men (26).

Although Aristotle did not consider there to be a specifically female essence, human femaleness traditionally has been associated with a woman's biological sex

including the requisite anatomy and physiology, her reproductive capabilities, and by extension her role as a care-giver in the family. At different times, this understanding of being female has been both touted and highly criticized by feminists. During the suffrage movement in the late nineteenth century, suffragettes upheld the importance of women's roles as mothers to support their argument for women's right to vote and for legal reforms (Tong 21). According to Ann Heilmann, suffragists cited "civic maternalism" and the "traditional notions of women's moral and spiritual superiority" to support their appeal for the vote (78).

Throughout the twentieth century, feminists struggled with how to respond to women's bodies, and their roles in reproduction, care of the family, and the home. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, connected women's bodies and social roles to their status as the second sex (Tong 244). In her famous quote from *The Second Sex,* Beauvoir contends that: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine" (281). In this quote, Beauvoir rejects the Aristotelian concept of an inherent and persistent essence and espouses a social constructionist perspective on gender. Battersby notes that Beauvoir, like Sartre, held that "'existence precedes essence,'" and she resisted and negated female embodiment in search of "the authentic, 'free' self that transforms the past and the present by projecting itself towards the future" (*Phenomenal Woman* 35-36). Certainly, Beauvoir had significant influence on how sex and gender were conceptualized by second-wave feminists and later by postmodernist and queer theorists (Heilmann 78).

Within feminism specifically, essentialism combines the idea of female essence with universalism. This particular combination has fueled the debate about essentialism between second and third-wave feminists. Patrice DiQuinzio views the problem of essentialism as the result of "a convergence of feminist theory and poststructuralism or postmodernism" (1). In "Essentialism and Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Philosophy," Alison Stone defines essentialism within feminism as "the view that there are properties essential to women, in that any woman must necessarily have those properties to be a woman at all" (138). In "This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray," Naomi Schor explains that essentialism is "the belief that woman has an essence, that woman can be specified by one or a number of inborn attributes that define across cultures and throughout history her unchanging being and in the absence of which she ceases to be categorized as a woman" (59). The interconnection between essentialism and universalism require that the characteristics that define women as such also are found in all women.

Even though second-wave feminists theorized distinctions between sex and gender and opposed biological essentialism, they also sought to identify what could unite women as members as a group. While biology may determine one's sex as female by anatomy and procreative capacity, second-wave feminists theorized that femininity is acquired and socially constructed. Or as Stone states: "being a woman is …dependent on identification with the female gender—the social traits, activities and roles that make up femininity" ("Essentialism" 139). DiQuinzio clarifies that for biological determinism, human biology not only establishes masculinity and femininity but also "the appropriately different positions of men and women in society" (2).

Therefore, gender identities are given different social worth (DiQuinzio 2). Stone maintains that many important feminists, including social constructionists, sanctioned a non-biological form of essentialism in their effort to describe the "invariant set of social characteristics that constitute femininity and that all women, *qua* women share" ("Essentialism" 139). As examples, Strong mentions the work of Nancy Hartsock, Catherine MacKinnon, Nancy Chodorow, and Carol Gilligan (139). Identifying women as a members of a group was foundational to the social and political activism of the second-wave.

So while second-wave feminists sought to define the sameness that women shared, third-wave feminists of the 1980s and 1990s responded by exploring difference and challenging what they saw as essentialist. In effect, anti-essentialism directed towards their predecessors is a defining characteristic of the third-wave. The third-wave feminists critiqued the second-wave for its universalism and lack of consideration for the diversity of women's experiences, positions, and identities (Stone "Essentialism" 140). Additionally, second-wave feminism was criticized for viewing as a norm "historically and culturally privileged forms of femininity" that recreated "patterns of oppression and exclusion" that feminism was trying to address (Stone "Essentialism" 140). Tong also observes that, in general, essentialist arguments have historically been a part of "the political-philosophical constructs of conservatism" used by oppressors to control and exclude an oppressed group (90).

These critiques resulted in the labeling of some feminist thinkers as essentialist and as a consequence those so labeled experienced professional repercussions. Schor calls the label of essentialism within feminism "the prime idiom of intellectual terrorism

and the privileged instrument of political orthodoxy" which "has been endowed within the context of feminism with the power to reduce to silence, to excommunicate, to consign to oblivion" ("This Essentialism" 59). For Schor, the essentialist in feminism "is one who instead of carefully holding apart the poles of sex and gender maps the feminine onto femaleness, one for whom the body, the female body, that is, remains, in however complex and problematic a way, the rock of feminism" (60). Some of the feminist thinkers who were labeled as essentialist did focus on the female body and the role of motherhood and mothering in women´s lives.

Schor delineates four different critiques of essentialism. They include the Liberationist critique and its social constructionist view of femininity, the Lacanian linguistic critique, the Derridean philosophical critique, and the feminist critique of universalism (60-2). All four of these arguments point out important aspects to consider when thinking about identity, and maternal identity in particular.

The "Liberationist Critique," associated with Beauvoir and a social constructionist view of femininity, opposes essentialist thought that endorses "an essential difference of women grounded in the body" (Schor 60). Instead, social constructionists question how patriarchal society forms, controls, and oppresses women (60). They challenge us to look at how we are trained to fit into society's expectations of how women and men behave and to view biology as less of a determinant.

The second, "The Linguistic Critique," is associated with Lacan and his disciples, especially Anglo-Americans (Schor 61). For Lacanians, "the essentialist …is a naïve realist who refuses to recognize that the loss of the referent is the condition of man's entry into language" (61). Gender is not determined by the body but by the

subject's position in relationship to the phallus at the center of this symbolic order, the Law of the Father (61). Feminism should then "expose and denaturalize the mechanisms whereby females are positioned as women" rather than reform society for women's benefit (61).

The third, "the Philosophical Critique" is associated with Derrida and Derridean feminists including Luce Irigaray. This critique connects essentialism with Western metaphysics, the "binary opposition man/woman," and the "illusions of presence, Being, stable meanings, and identities" (Schor 61). For Derrideans, "the essentialist …[is] one who fails to acknowledge the play of difference in language and the difference it makes" (61). The Derridean perspective is to challenge our concepts of stable meanings and binary oppositions.

The fourth type of critique is "the Feminist Critique" which focuses on the "'false universalism'" of essentialism (Schor 62). By positing "woman" as universal, essentialism excludes women, especially minorities, because it does not recognize "real lived differences—sexual, ethnic, racial, national, cultural, economic, generational—that divide women from each other and from themselves" (62). The feminist critique challenges the idea of "Woman" as a universal across cultures, history, classes, races, and generations.

These critiques of the idea of a female essence or sameness among women are valuable because they cause us to consider how society forms our concepts of gender and related behaviors. They also spur us to include other elements of people's identities—historical context, ethnic and racial identities, class, and culture. In addition, it is important to reflect on how language and relationship to social power influence our

concepts of gender and to understand that meaning changes and does not have to be ruled by dualism. Finally, these critiques compel us to understand that there are differences among women and their experiences of being a woman. In contrast, other feminist theorists have challenged these critiques because they participate in the perpetuation of patriarchal thought, the aversion to the female body, and the marginalization in society and among feminists of those who identify with the female body and the maternal body.

Our Western ideas of personhood and identity require a denial and separation from the female maternal body. In *Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Maternal Subjectivity*, Alison Stone states that "in the West the self has often been understood in opposition to the maternal body, such that one must break away from the mother and maternal care-givers on whom one depends in infancy and childhood to become a full participant in the spiritual, political, or cultural values of one's community" (1). For example, from Freudian psychology, we have inherited the idea that the child has to separate from the mother, both emotionally and from her body, in order to gain an independent identity and to become a subject. From this perspective, one literally and figuratively has to cut the cord to be one's own person.

Feminism continues to struggle with the female body and, in some forms, marginalizes female-identified women—those who form their identities in connection with their female bodies and the capacity to have children. Battersby speaks of this marginalization by the postmodernists:

> What potential for opposition is open to those who cannot – or would not – reject the connection between being female and birthing? Indeed, philosophically speaking, what is it to think identity, personhood, essence from the position of one who is normalized by the discourse of patriarchy as abnormal

> – with a body that bleeds with the potentiality of new selves? (*Phenomenal Woman* 17)

With these questions Battersby challenges Judith Butler's disregard for reproductive capacity as an indication of femaleness, but she is also confronting the absence of philosophical explorations of the issues of birth, reproductive capacity, and identity (16-18).

With these challenges, is it possible to conceive of identity for women that acknowledges the body, especially a menstruating, potentially fertile, pregnant, or lactating female body? Is it possible to conceive of a positive identity and subjectivity for women that does not require submission to the Law of the Father and rejection of womanhood? Can we move past the universalism and determinism of the concept of female essence as the basis for women's identities and yet still allow room for sexual difference? While exclusionary concepts of essence should be discarded, how can we conceive of female subjectivities and how can women identify as a group for collective action?

The Subject and Subjectivity

The answer to these questions is to envision woman, including the mother, as a thinking, rational, and embodied agent which is capable of creating meaning and cultural products of value. In other words, a mother, a woman, is a subject. Women must be recognized as thinking, speaking, creating, and embodied subjects on their own merits in a manner that recognizes their diversity, without restricting their expressions of subjectivity, and comes to terms with their bodies and potential for motherhood. Additionally, in order to be considered subjects, women should not be required to

imitate men, express "masculine" qualities, or to ignore their bodies. Women should not have to be androgynous to be recognized as subjects.

"Subject" is a philosophical term used today to signify the self with the agency to make decisions and the ability to reason and use language meaningfully. As Weedon states, a subject is "an individual conceived of as a sovereign, rational and unified consciousness, in control of language and meaning. It is the 'I' that thinks and speaks and is the apparent author of meaning" (5). Stone defines the subject in a similar manner as "a self-conscious and autonomous agent who is the source of normative authority and meaning" (*Feminism* 1). Therefore, a subject is a self-aware individual who is able to think rationally, make decisions independently, and act upon those decisions. The subject is also one person who is complete unto his or herself, or unified. In addition to being a rational, unified, and autonomous individual with agency, a subject also creates meaning through language.

Until the twentieth century, this unified, autonomous, rational subject who authors meaning has been conceived of as male while the woman was thought of as the object, or the Other. The focus on thought, independence, and agency is aligned with traditional concepts of men's capacities in opposition to women's supposed emotionality and dependence. As previously mentioned, these descriptions of subject and object respect the binary divisions between mind/body, reason/emotion, and culture/nature, in which the man is thought to be more representative of mind, reason, and culture, and the woman is thought to fall on the side of the body, emotion, and nature. Various feminist scholars with varying success have sought to contest and

dismantle the concept of the exclusively male subject and have advocated for female subjectivity.

Simone de Beauvoir, for example, was concerned with women's access to subjectivity. According Schor, Beauvoir's subject is "the familiar Hegelian subject of existentialist ethics" who strives for transcendence and liberation from immanence ("This Essentialism" 63). Schor states: "Subjectivity is, for Beauvoir, activity, a restless projection into the future, a glorious surpassing of the iterativity [sic] of everyday life" (63). From this perspective, the subject is associated with the world of men with its activity and freedom in the public sphere. Under patriarchy, women are the Other, passive and trapped in the everyday world of the domestic sphere: "The dreadful fall from transcendence into immanence is woman's estate. Consigned by the masterful male subject to passivity and repetition, woman in patriarchy is a prisoner of immanence" (63). For Beauvoir, women are oppressed by being designated as the Other and prevented from striving for transcendence, and yet subjectivity for women is achieved by rejecting the feminine and the domestic. In order to achieve subjectivity, women must strive for transcendence in the public sphere, modeling themselves on men, and to do so they must close the door on the domestic sphere and traditional feminine roles.

Luce Irigaray too seeks to open the door to subjectivity for women but without eliminating their femaleness. According to Schor, Irigaray conceives of the subject "as a speaking subject, a pronoun, the first-person singular *I*," yet Irigaray's subject is gendered male ("This Essentialism" 64). Unlike for Beauvoir, for women to have subjectivity "clearly means becoming speaking subjects in their own right," in such a

way that they do not lose their difference (64). Schor states that Irigaray exposes "the logic of saming" and criticizes the universal which "denies the objectified other the right to her difference, submitting the other to the laws of phallic specularity" (65). Irigaray's conceptualizing of difference as positive seeks not to define woman, but allow "the difference *within* difference" to emerge (66).

In "*Who* Engenders Politics" Adriana Cavarero divides feminism into two groups, or "styles of thinking:" those who ascribe to the idea of the Cartesian metaphysical subject, "strong, self-centered, and present unto itself," and those who ascribe to postmodern subjectivity, "multiple, fragmented, and without a center" associated with French and Lacanian theorists (88). For Cavarero, these standpoints repeat previous patriarchal positions. In response, Cavarero proposes a theory of identity focused on the question "who are you?" in which a subject is a unique individual with a name, face, and a life story: "He or she is an unrepeatable existing being whose identity coincides perfectly with that lived life that is his/her story." (91). According to Cavarero, her theory of "identity as life story is in a position to threaten both the presumed universality of the metaphysical subject and the obligatory fragmentariness of the postmodernist subject." Inspired by Hanna Arendt, Cavarero's theory of identity says that each person is unique, is a thinking being that exists in a physical body, has a story, and lives in relationship to others.

The Embodied, Relational Maternal Subject

Like Cavarero, Christine Battersby proposes in *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity* a "relational model of identity" that makes space for a "female identity" and also allows for a diversity of "feminine

response[s] to the paradoxes and predicaments of the female subject-position in western modernity" (6). She also recognizes the influences of "race, nation, religion, education, family-background, neighbourhood, class, wealth" on the "individualized self that persists through time" (6). Battersby's model of identity attempts to respond to the previously mentioned criticisms of universalism by acknowledging the diversity of women's experiences and the external factors that impact identity.

Battersby also recognizes potential criticisms of essentialism and that many postmodern thinkers are uncomfortable with metaphysics. Battersby admits that many women are "distinctly uneasy with a feminist metaphysics that includes an emphasis on birth" because feminists have worked hard to separate women's identities from reproduction (4). She goes on to point out that there are two normative human states regarding birth, the "male human [which] cannot give birth" and "the female human [which] can give birth" (4). She challenges us to move past the metaphysics which is based on "an identity that cannot give birth" and think of the human identity in such a way that "[m]othering, parenting and the fact of being born … become fully integrated into what is entailed in being a human 'person' or 'self'" (4, 2). Instead of only considering the male model of normal human identity, Battersby contends that the embodied female subject should be considered normal.

Battersby describes five features of the female-subject position. First, the concept of natality recognizes that the self is born from a female body. Natality also includes the idea of an embodied female self with the potential to give birth (Battersby 200, 4). Second, the female-subject position is situated within "webs of dependence" (205). Battersby rejects the idealization of the equal and autonomous self because in

reality women, especially mothers, function within networks of dependence in which "power-dependencies and inequalities" are central (8, 201). These networks of dependence are present in the fundamental dependency of the fetus on the mother as well as women's continued societal roles as primary caregivers (201). Third, the maternal subject-position is relational (8). From the female subject-position, the 'self' and the 'other' cannot be separated because paradoxically, the other can be situated both outside and within the self (8-9). Moreover, the female self can also contain and give birth to the "not-self" or the other (38).

Fourth, the female-subject position is embodied unlike the prevalent concepts of a disembodied, "autonomous and individualized 'soul' or 'mind' that merely inhabits the flesh" (9-10). Battersby advocates for conceiving of a female subject-position that emerges from the "fleshy" female body and is "linked to fleshy continuity" (9-10). Fifth, the female-subject position is paradoxical because woman is considered to be a deviation from the male norm (11). For Battersby, "the 'experience' of the female human in our culture has direct links with the anomalous, the monstrous, the inconsistent and the paradoxical" (11). Thus, Battersby argues for a female subject-position situated within dependent relationships and that is a paradoxical, relational, embodied female self that was born from a woman's body and has the potential to give birth. This is a concept of the female self that recognizes women as fully normal human beings while also acknowledging sexual difference. Battersby provides the philosophical space in which to conceive of an embodied female self and a maternal self and which provides the room for the maternal self to act as a maternal creative subject.

Feminist Influences and Perspectives in the Spanish Context

Among feminist scholars of Peninsular women's writings, there is a division of opinion about the use of non-Spanish feminist theories in literary scholarship. On the one hand, Roberta Johnson represents scholars who advocate for using Spanish feminist theorists, setting aside the Anglo-American and French theorists. On the other hand, when researching feminist theory and the centers of women's and gender studies in Spain, I found that many of the same feminist theorists were being read, studied, and used in scholarship. Although individuals differ in their preferences, Spanish feminist theory is not separate from Anglo-American and French feminist theory and shares many of the same influences. One distinguishing feature of Spanish feminism is the influence of Italian feminists and sexual difference.

In her 2003 article "Spanish Feminist Theory Then and Now" in the *Anales de la literatura española contemporánea*, Roberta Johnson challenges scholars in Peninsular feminist studies and other Hispanists to end our "thirty-year apprenticeship" (18) to French and Anglo-American feminist theorists and to apply "autochthonous [Spanish feminist] theory" in our study and criticism of Spanish literature of the twentieth-century (11). However, Johnson acknowledges the influence in Spain of the "pure theorists" from France and North America (Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Carol Gilligan, Nancy Chodorow, and Judith Butler) and the "'pragmatic theorists'" from the Anglo-American literary field such as Annis Pratt and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (12). Johnson specifically criticizes the "imposition of foreign models on a native culture, models that skew the original cultural product in ways that make it look more like the dominant culture than it otherwise would" (13). Her concern

is that in using Anglo-American and French feminist thinkers instead of Spanish feminist thinkers, we run the risk of imposing our own notions and biases on the Spanish writings we study. Therefore, according to Johnson, we should use Spanish feminist theory and theorists to construct our analyses of Spanish literature (16). In particular, Johnson recommends the following Spanish writers: Carmen de Burgos (1867-1932), Rosa Chacel (1898-1994), Margarita Nelken (1896-1968), and Lidia Falcón (b. 1935) (14).

In my opinion, Johnson presumes a false separation between Spanish feminist thought and French and Anglo-American feminist thought. Indeed, Spanish feminist thought is influenced by feminist writers from France, Great Britain, the United States, and Italy. The French feminists' theories of sexual difference and the writings of Luce Irigaray have been particularly influential in Spanish feminist circles. In addition, the Italian feminist thinkers, Luisa Muraro and Adriana Cavarero as well as others from the feminist organizations of Verona's Diotima and the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective have had a very strong influence on Spanish feminist thought, and many of these Italian feminist thinkers were also highly influenced by Irigaray.

For example, Duoda, or the *Centre de Recerca de Dones de la Universitat de Barcelona*, is an interdisciplinary research center for Women's Studies University of Barcelona, and it is oriented around sexual difference with connections to Muraro and Diotima. María Milagros Garretas Rivera, a member of Duoda's faculty, has been one of the most prolific interpreters of Muraro and Irigaray for the Spanish feminist community. In addition, the influence of non-Spanish feminists is also evident in reading lists such as the "Biblioteca básica" listed by the *Librería de mujeres* in Madrid

on its website which shows a strong representation of feminists from Italy and United States. The gender studies program at the *Universidad Complutense de Madrid*, the *Oficina para la igualdad de género*, published an extensive reading list entitled "Libros básicos sobre género, feminismo y mujeres." The forty books listed in just the feminist theory section alone include authors from Spain, the United States, Italy, France, Great Britain, Argentina, and India, including authors such as Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Judith Butler, Luisa Muraro, Luce Irigaray, Simone de Beauvoir, and Mary Wollstonecraft. Furthermore, the scholar Rosa María Cid López provides some insight into the mix of influences in Spanish feminism.

At the beginning of her chapter "La maternidad y la figura de la madre en la Roma antigua," Rosa María Cid López provides an introduction to feminist theory and motherhood for *Nuevas visiones de la maternidad* (2002). Cid traces the history of feminist questioning of ideas such as women being destined to be mothers, motherhood being the female essence, and the linking of womanliness and motherhood (11). In this history, Cid cites the following feminist thinkers on motherhood as significant: "Simone de Beauvoir … Nancy Chodorov, Adrianne Rich, Silvia Vegetti o Luisa Muraro" (11). In particular, Adrienne Rich seems to be very influential to Spanish feminist thought on motherhood.

Cid discusses Simone de Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone, and Juliet Mitchel as examples of authors who challenged ideas about women's roles and motherhood. Beauvoir rejected motherhood as part of her existentialism in part because children and motherhood would limit a woman's ability to reach her full potential and because she objected to the pro-natal policies of the post-World War II period (Cid López 12).

Radical feminist thinkers theorized ways to liberate women from their reproductive function in society like Shulamith Firestone who proposed that reproduction be accomplished by artificial means or Juliet Mitchel who wished to shift the care and education of children to the State (12). Like Beauvoir, the Spanish psychologist Silvia Tubert in the book *Figuras de la madre* (1996) argues that motherhood is a social construction and disputes motherhood as the natural state of woman (14).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the distinction between equality feminism and sexual difference feminism became more prominent. Cid defines difference feminism as a movement that reclaims the importance of sexual difference and the role of the mother: "una reivindicación de la función maternal, que entendían como una vía de poder femenino, una fuente de placer y también de conocimiento" (12). From this perspective, motherhood is a radical source of "poder … placer y … conocimiento" distinct from the oppressive and limiting institution of motherhood as conceived by a patriarchal society (12-13). According to Cid, difference feminists such as Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Adrianne Rich, and Luisa Muraro "[a]nimaban a las mujeres a que tomasen conciencia de la posesión de un cuerpo con capacidad generadora" (12). Cid defines motherhood as not just being limited to the biological reproductive process but including the nurture and education of the children, and thus motherhood intersects with issues of economics, social relationships, political power relations, and religion (14). In my opinion, the balanced scholarly work of Cid represents the varied international influences on Spanish feminism and acknowledges the importance of both social-constructivist and sexual difference feminist perspectives on motherhood.

In *Women in contemporary Spain* (1997), Anny Brooksbank Jones provides a detailed overview of the formal and informal feminist activism that occurred during the Franco dictatorship, the transition to democracy, and into the nineties. Her analysis highlights three trends in Spanish feminism, particularly in the 1970s (7). First, many feminists were dual-activists, involved both in feminist and political activism, especially on the left (7). The socialist feminists tended to maintain separate affiliations between their party and feminist group memberships (8). The often younger radical feminists tended to reject dual activism and can be categorized into two different types of radical feminism (8). According to Brooksbank Jones, one group was similar to U.S. radical feminists, viewed men and women as "opposed sexual classes, and focused on issues around sexuality and reproduction" (8). The second group of radical feminists were a "peculiarly Spanish" form, similar to socialist feminism, viewed men and women as "opposed social classes, and focused on women's role in the production and reproduction of material life" (8).

Difference feminism influenced younger women and the radical feminists until the 1979 Granada Jornadas Feministas in which "the familiar distinction between single and dual activism [was] redrawn around the axes of equality and difference" (8, 11). Those feminists who worked through their parties for economic, social, and legal reforms were usually allied with equality feminism. Influenced by French and Italian feminist writers, the difference feminists called themselves "independents" and rejected what they viewed as "androcentric politics" (11-12). Brooksbank Jones explains that these independent feminists thought that "eradication of social and economic inequalities would not, of itself, mean the end of the patriarchal system …[so] they

demanded active participation in the construction of knowledge and saw personal, lived experience as the only legitimate starting point" (11). Unlike the dual activist and party feminists, the independent feminists did not see legal reforms and political parties as effective because the political system and parties recreated patriarchal and "inflexible hierarchical structures that compromised women's political and personal autonomy and blocked the development of their gendered specificity" (12). These two separate forms of feminism—equality feminism that is more institutional and allied with political parties and independent and radical feminists focused on direct activism and women's identities—have continued their influence but there has been greater openness to more diverse types of feminism and activism, such as feminist religious groups and ecofeminist organizations (33-34).

To conclude this section, Spanish feminism is not isolated from the feminism theorized and practiced in Italy, France, Great Britain, and the United States. The major types of feminisms found in the United States—liberal or equality feminism, radical feminism, ecofeminism, etc.—also have had expression in Spain. However, difference feminism has had a stronger influence in Spain. While scholars should be careful to not impose theories and interpretations that do not fit the Spanish context, there is a great deal of latitude available for scholars to choose from a variety of feminist filters with which to interpret the rich literary production of Spanish authors.

Chapter III: The Embodied and Relational Maternal Identity in *Niño y sombras*

Introduction

Concha Méndez's collection of poems *Niño y sombras* (1936) exemplifies the literary expression of an embodied and relational maternal identity. Instead of using birth as a creative metaphor, Méndez describes pregnancy, birth, and loss as lived experiences from the maternal viewpoint. In the poems of *Niño y sombras*, Méndez emphasizes the embodied experience of pregnancy—the mother's physical changes and discomforts, her feeling the movements of the fetus, the blood connection they share, and the physical experience of loss. These poems also express deep and enduring interconnections between the mother and infant that occur without the benefit of visual and tactile reinforcement due to the death of the child. Méndez creates and reinforces her own maternal self through her expression of the embodied and relational elements of the maternal identity.

This chapter focuses on an analysis of Méndez's conception of an embodied and relational maternal identity as revealed in the poems of *Niño y sombras* and explores how Méndez claims a continued maternal identity even after the stillbirth of her first child. The analysis of maternal identity in *Niño y sombras* begins with an examination of how Méndez reveals her embodiment as a mother, demonstrating that her self-concept as a mother is strongly connected to her body. This maternal embodiment began before the child's birth and is symbolically continued through her body after his death. The chapter then explores the relational aspect of maternal identity. This section analyzes the expressions of the mother's relationship with the child before birth, the

deep loss she feels when separated from him by death, and the promise of an enduring relationship with him in spite of their separation.

Analysis

The Embodied Maternal Identity

Throughout the collection *Niño y sombras,* Concha Méndez situates the self in the maternal body. Overall, Méndez's poems demonstrate the embodiment of maternal identity by emphasizing the mother's body and by using corporeal references. From the beginning of the collection, Méndez refers to the mother as a vessel who holds the child in her body and her memory. However, rather than presenting the reader with woman as a passive vessel, Méndez depicts the mother as a creator of life who experiences the movement of the infant in her womb, endures the discomfort of pregnancy, suffers from pain of labor, grieves the physical and emotional loss of her son, and even so, continues to nurture him after death. Catherine Bellver acknowledges this maternal and creative embodiment when she observes that Méndez presents "woman as container and at the same time as a transcending force" ("Hands" 334). In the poems, the mother contains and carries the child not just in her womb, the child can be found also in the mother's blood, torso and internal organs, and in her tears and heart. Méndez connects the body and the soul in her description of the creation of the child within the mother's body by involving both the material and the spiritual, both the blood and the soul of the mother.

In addition to the power of creation and connection with the child, Méndez also presents negative elements of maternal embodiment in the poems of *Niño y sombras*. The poems present the physical and emotional aspects of motherhood as solitary

experiences, and they reference the temporality and discomforts of pregnancy. Furthermore, Méndez demonstrates the parallels between the woundedness of the mother's body and her emotional pain. In spite of the pain and loss, Méndez expresses the mother's desire to continue her physical and emotional ties to the child, and this desire is symbolized by the mother's nurturing hand. Thus throughout the collection, Méndez's poetic voice builds her case for a maternal identity through a process of embodiment even as she resists the notion that she is not a mother because she lost her child.

The first two poems of the *Niño y sombras* present the mother's body as a vessel both for the child and for the memory of him. These poems illustrate how her body which carried the child in pregnancy continues to metaphorically hold the child after his death. In Poem 1, the poetic voice locates the memory of her child in her aching abdomen, at the very core of her body, after he has left this world: "dejando en mis entrañas / en dolor, el recuerdo" (3-4). The body, which so recently contained and nurtured the infant, is now the receptacle for his memory. Méndez's use of the word *entrañas* implies a broader location for the pain and memory than just in the womb; all of her internal organs, including the heart, ache from the loss. Therefore, Méndez locates both the physical pain of birth and the emotional pain of losing her child within the mother's body and sets a foundation for her continued maternal identity.

In the final verses of Poem 2, the heart becomes the vessel for the child. Just as the womb served as an interior cradle to rock and keep the child safe, the poetic voice declares the heart to be a secret cradle: "Mi corazón que es cuna que en secreto te guarda / porque sabe que fuiste y te llevó en la vida / te seguirá meciendo hasta el fin de

mis horas" (7-9). Within the cradle of her heart, the child and her memory of him are safe. In moving the central locus of the embodiment of her maternal identity from the womb to the heart, Méndez echoes the origins of the blood from the first verse and reinforces both the physical and emotional connections between the mother and child. Through her memories and words, Méndez carefully reestablishes the physical and spiritual bonds that connect mother and child and reasserts her maternal identity.

Physiologically the developing fetus is at the center of the mother's body in the womb, and Méndez's poems emphasize this centrality. For example, in Poem 1 Méndez refers to the child as the center of her universe: "Tú, sangre de mi sangre, / centro de mi universo" (9-10). This placement of the child who shares her blood at the center of her body and her whole world emphasizes his importance to her both physically and emotionally.

In Poem 22 entitled "Noche," Méndez makes her most direct reference to maternal embodiment as a vessel for the child. The poetic voice identifies the paradox of pregnancy that a mother contains another body within her own: "otro cuerpo en mi cuerpo" (6). Within the textual context, this reference to embodiment is complicated by its connection to death. This too is a paradox of pregnancy; for in the creation and birth of new life, the mother also finds herself faced by the possibility of death. Méndez acknowledges this paradox at the beginning of "Noche" as the shadow of death invades her body and her dreams, impacting her body at the cellular level:

> Una sombra compacta
> se ha internado en mi pecho
> que remueve mis células
> ennegrece mis sueños.
> Es la muerte sin muerte
> de otro cuerpo en mi cuerpo. (1-6)

The poetic voice explains that this shadowy invasion is the result of the death of the child's body within her own. In the infant's dying, part of her own body has also died, requiring her to fight for her own life. As Begoña Martínez Trufero explains in her dissertation chapter on *Niño y sombras,* "El duelo de la madre como proceso de reafirmación de la identidad," the death of an infant at birth can be compared to "la pérdida de un miembro" (266). The metaphor of perinatal death as mutilation of the mother's body emphasizes the importance of the bodily connection between mother and child to the maternal identity. Martínez Trufero also refers to the emotional aspect of this loss as a "mutilación anímica" (271). In losing the infant, the poetic voice has lost a part of her own body and her center.

Méndez repeatedly makes a connection between the body and the soul and their importance in the creation of the infant. Méndez emphasizes the importance of the blood which moves between herself and the child. In addition, she draws a parallel between the formation of the child's body from the mother's blood and the formation of the child's soul from the mother's soul. This establishes two channels of interconnection between the mother and child—blood and soul—that begin at conception, become active in the womb, and continue after birth. Thus, the interdependence of mother and child and the woman's identity as a mother begin before birth and are secured by physical and spiritual bond, through the sharing of blood and tissue as well as spirit and identity.

In several poems, Méndez makes the blood connection explicit. In "Poem 1," Méndez refers to the child as "sangre de mi sangre" (9), and she reminds him of his origin from her blood, given that the mother and child share blood in the womb.

Martínez Trufero comments that this blood connection allows the survivor to identify herself with the one who died and maintain "psicológicamente la continuidad de la relación" (266). And in the seventh poem entitled "Niño perdido," the lost child is a "tierna flor de sangre" (5). His body is like a flower formed from her blood yet picked too soon. Martínez Trufero observes that "la poeta afirma la existencia del hijo como ser en esa sangre hecha cuerpo" but that the metaphor comparing the child to a "tierna flor" suggests his vulnerability, "su carácter efímero y delicado" (270). In adding blood to the image of the delicate flower, Méndez emphasizes the fragility of the form of the flower as it brings to mind the contracted posture and the ruddy, delicate skin of a newborn, the warmth of the mother's blood, and the loss of blood during birth.

At the beginning of the "Poem 2," the maternal poetic voice reminds both the child and the reader of her maternal embodiment and the child's origins in her body and soul. Her blood is used to form his body: "Se desprendió mi sangre para formar tu cuerpo," and her soul is divided to create his soul: "Se repartió mi alma para formar tu alma" (1-2). The mother and child share the physical and spiritual bonds of blood and soul, and therefore their identities are intertwined. The fourth poem, "Fue," also connects soul and blood in the formation of the child. First, the mother's soul conceived the child's soul: "mi alma concibió la tuya" (3). Then, Méndez describes the role of the mother's blood in defining the infant's shape: "Mi sangre fué después / a señalar con pulso / preciso tu contorno" (4.7-9). The mother's heartbeat sends her blood pulsing through her body and the child's revealing his form and confirming his existence. These interwoven connections between their souls and physical beings create

strong bonds and are the basis for the poet's affirmation of her child and her claim for motherhood, even when the child is no longer living.

Méndez presents maternal embodiment as a solitary experience. Although other members of a family may develop identities as father, sibling, or grandparent prior to the birth of a child, only the mother's identity is embodied because only she contains another life within her. In Poem 3 entitled "Recuerdo," the only poem in the collection in which she uses the terms "nacer," "madre," "hijo," and "seno," Méndez conveys the isolation and intimacy of the maternal bodily experience. The poetic voice expresses her personal loneliness as mother while waiting for the impending birth:

> Ibas a nacer, yo sóla
> iba contigo a esperarte
> La madre va siempre sóla
> quien quiera que la acompañe; (3.1-4)

In these verses, the poetic voice is paradoxically both alone— "yo sóla"—and together with the unborn infant— "iba contigo" (3.1-2). The poetic voice then broadens her observation on the mother's lonesome condition by noting that, although she may have companions or attendants with her, the mother faces birth alone because her physical experience and perspective are distinct.

Méndez compares this solitude in the midst of others to being in the desolate desert and her son to the fertile, life-giving oasis.

> el mundo es como un desierto
> y el hijo en él un oasis
> Caminabas en mi seno,
> mis ojos se hacían más grandes; (3.5-8)

Méndez metaphorically describes the physical process of labor as a journey the mother must make alone to arrive at the oasis of her son. And yet, it is the child who must journey through the birth canal and as a material representation of that journey, the

mother feels the child physically walking in her womb. The child's movements in the womb and the mother's reaction illustrate the communication between mother and unborn child. In addition, by specifying his active movements, the poetic voice provides evidence that the child was alive and present in her womb shortly before birth. Since these verses make the physical experience of pregnancy concrete, they confirm the mother's embodiment and the prenatal relationship between mother and infant.

The poetic voice also argues for an embodied maternal identity through references to the time and discomfort of pregnancy. In two poems, Méndez specifies that her pregnancy was full-term, referring specifically to the nine moons of her pregnancy. In Poem 2, she speaks directly to the child, first reminding him of his origins in her blood and soul and then complaining to him about the discomfort of pregnancy. The poetic voice emphasizes the anxiety, discomfort, and fatigue of the nine months, explaining to her child: "Y fueron nueve lunas y fue toda una angustia / de días sin reposo y noches desveladas" (3-4). Her complaint about her inability to rest both during the day and night suggests some maternal ambivalence and indicates a shared experience with other pregnant women during pregnancy.

In the sixth poem "Canción," Méndez also refers to the temporal nature of pregnancy and the transitory possession of the child by the mother. Bellver states "the intrusion of temporality creates an emotional longing expressed as nostalgia for what has disappeared or was never attained" (*Absence* 14). This longing for her lost child is evident in the verses: "Ya tiene la tierra algo / que fué mio nueve lunas" (1-2). Besides mentioning the length of her pregnancy, these verses make the death and burial of her son concrete and emphasize the loss the mother has suffered. In Poem 9, the poetic

voice seeks to preserve in her memory the emotional and embodied responses that the mother experienced during pregnancy and the waiting that pregnancy entails. Méndez asks: "Quede de mí la angustia y el anhelo / y la risa y el llanto en esa espera" (5-6). The memories of these emotional and corporeal experiences shape her sense of being and support her assertions of maternal identity.

In *Niño y sombras*, the physical experience of motherhood is complicated by pain and loss, and the wounded maternal body becomes an important component to Méndez's personal identification with her lost child and motherhood. As the mother's body is wounded through her experience of birth and death, her maternal identity is also wounded. The expressions of woundedness appear throughout the collection. As discussed earlier, in the first poem the poetic voice tells the reader she is in pain, "mis entrañas / en dolor," (3-4). Although the physical pain results from giving birth, the poetic voice also identifies the emotional pain the poetic voice experiences in losing her son and being left with only a memory of his physical presence: "dejando en mis entrañas / en dolor, el recuerdo" (3-4). In "Poem 8," the memory of the day of the child's birth and death is personified as an unwelcome and hurtful visitor. The memory of "aquel día" leaves the mother with wounds so painful that she wishes the memory would not come:

> que aquel recuerdo me deja,
> cuando me viene, una herida
> y ya no me queda sitio
> donde poder recibirla. (3-6).

She is so hurt that there is no more space for another physical or emotional wound. She can not endure the repeated wounds that the memory brings. This metaphor of the memory as a visitor who wounds communicates how physical and emotional pain

dovetail and intersect with one another, and how emotional pain can linger even after the physical body has begun to heal.

In Poem 22, entitled "Noche," the mother's body has been invaded, wounded, and has become a battlefield. As mentioned earlier, the references in "Noche" to embodiment are complex because of the internal battle within the mother's body. At the beginning of the poem, the poetic voice describes the invasion of her body by a shadowy force which impacts not only her physical being but also her emotional being as illustrated by her blackened dreams: "ennegrece mis sueños" (4). Outside of the context of the loss of a child during pregnancy or at birth, these verses seem to describe an infection invading her body, but the poetic voice explains that the shadow is the death of the baby:

> Es la muerte sin muerte
> de otro cuerpo en mi cuerpo.
> Mis defensas se yerguen
> por luchar contra esto;
> y yo, campo en batalla,
> con los miembros deshechos,
> aposté por la vida
> por las luces de nuevo.
> Me sostiene la frente
> un vendaje de anhelos. (5-14)

Despite her resistance, the poetic voice's body and psyche suffer the consequences of the invasion of death. The mother herself is the battlefield, and she is left maimed and devastatingly injured. In spite of the poem's focus on the woundedness of her maternal body and identity, Méndez concludes the poem with references to life and healing. The pregnancy was a wager for the possibility to bring new life into the world, and her longings for life have the power to sustain her and offer the possibility of hope and

healing. Thus, her maternal desires help her endure the battle against death and depression.

Later in Poem 26, "Yo sé," Méndez again mentions the mother's aching flesh: "Así ha empezado el mundo / piececitos pisando / la carne que ha dolido" (44-46). Here an infant's feet step or push upon the mother's sore abdomen, and Méndez connects the mother's creation of a child with the creation of the world. The woundedness of the mother's body in "Yo sé" is given a more positive tone as the child described in this section of the poem is alive, and because the wounded maternal body is essential to bring both the child and the world into being.

In the collection *Niño y sombras*, the mother's continued desire to care and nurture the child after death is symbolized by her outstretched hand. The hands are a powerful symbol because they are the part of the body that touches others, manipulates objects, prepares food, writes words, plays music, molds sculptures, shows tenderness to others, and holds the baby. As Bellver states: "The motif of the hand provides a lens with which to focus on the gynocentric conceptualization of creativity, desire, self and other. With their hands, the poetic speakers…create poetry, human life, and their personal other. Thanks to their hands, their bodies are imbued with generative power" ("Hands" 342). The hands are the part of the body that we use to reach out to and connect with others, and as Bellver comments, hands have the potential to remove obstacles between people and create transformational relationships (343). From her studies of women poets, Bellver observes: "Among these women poets, touch is the ultimate form of communication because not only does it unite two bodies physically, it also fosters psychic fulfillment" (343).

In Poem 7, "Niño perdido," Méndez uses the mother's hand to express the desire to cross the boundary separating mother and dead child, connect with the child, and care for him. As she searches for her child in an oneiric landscape, the mother reaches out to her lost child with her hand:

> Para tí mi mano
> caliente de amores,
> que ahora a la esperanza
> del dolor se abre…
> Esta mano mía
> que para buscarte
> en la noche triste
> más allá del aire
> se me va conmigo,
> y todo es en balde,
> que alcanzar no puede
> ni sentir tu carne
> de niño nacido
> con pena y sin aire, (6-19)

The hand symbolizes her maternal love and concern, yet the poetic voice knows that her search will lead to sadness and pain. As Martínez Trufero explains, the mother attempts to connect with the child in the cold and desolate landscape of her dream, "donde solo existen el *yo* lírico y el *tú* exaltado en el ámbito de la muerte," with the warmth and gentleness of her maternal touch ("El duelo" 270). Yet this attempt at connection is destined to fail "porque cuando la madre intente trasladar esa expresión del amor metaforizada en el tacto, comprobará que la no-existencia, la no-entidad anula toda la posibilidad de unión" (Martínez Trufero 270-271). In other words, the divide between the living and the dead is a boundary that can't be crossed. In spite of the futility of her efforts, the poetic voice expresses great willingness to search and reach out to the lost child. The poetic voice knows her actions are in vain because her warm, loving hand cannot traverse the divide between the living and the dead, even in her dreams. And so,

what the mother was unable to do in life, touch her dead child, she is unable to do even in this dreamscape, and yet she still makes the nurturing gesture of love with her outstretched hand.

In Poem 14, “Deseo,” the maternal identity of the poet is embodied abstractly through her nurturing hand. As Méndez does in other poems in the collection, the poetic voice broadens her maternal concern from just her child to humanity, personified here as a lost little girl. In six mostly octosyllabic verses, the poet expresses compassion for humanity lost in the chaos of the 1930s. And so the poetic voice expresses her wish to take a "lost Humanity” by the hand as she would a lost child:

> ¡Que mi mano fuese grande
> tan grande como mis sueños
> y poderlo abarcar todo,
> y la Humanidad una niña
> tan perdida como está
> a quien coger de la mano! (1-6).

As in “Niño perdido” in which the poetic voice wishes to save her lost child, Méndez expresses a similar wish in “Deseo” to save lost humanity. Therefore, in this poem, she generalizes her maternal nurturing to all of humanity.

This open, nurturing hand is contrasted by the empty hands in other poems in *Niño y sombras*. Bellver observes that “Méndez is skillful in exploiting the symbolization of presence rooted in the hand image to represent the opposite: absence” (“Hands” 338). The empty hands allow the reader to visualize the absence of the child and thus the mother’s loss. In Poem 1, the poetic voice exclaims “¡Qué vacio [sic] dejaste, / al partir, en mis manos!” (18-19). Here the empty hands symbolize the mother’s loss of the infant, but they also represent her emotional loss and the loss of her status as a mother in the eyes of society. Instead of a child to hold in her hands, she is

left with nothing. As Bellver notes the empty hands denote "her anguish over that loss" (338). The warm and expectant mother's hands, ready to reach out to her child, hold nothing but the metaphorical weight of her pain.

The sense of empty hands is again referenced in Poem 13: "¿Dónde fué el alba que floreció en mis manos?" (3). Here the emptiness may represent a more general loss of a new day or new start. Furthermore, the "alba" or dawn may represent the new life of the child, and the empty hands of the poetic voice are the mother's. If so, this verse echoes the *ubi sunt* motif of the first four verses of Poem 1 in asking where has the dawn gone? The poetic voice laments the loss of the possibility of new life, and a new day.

Méndez also conveys an embodied identity in a more general way in several poems. In Poem 19, the poetic voice is enclosed within a walled garden. This gloomy and barren garden, "Jardín sin sueño de frondas," with its never-ending silent afternoon, and foggy shadows represents her grief and depression (1-3). Although Méndez places the poetic voice within the confinement of the garden, the poem quickly shifts from the barriers surrounding her to the possibility of overcoming them. The poetic voice longs to fly above the walls and leave the limitations behind: "Hay fronteras, siento un límite, / quiero pasarlas en vuelo" (5-6). This shift is in keeping with the theme of freedom that Bellver notes in her earlier poetry: "the poetry she wrote between 1925 and 1933 escapes confinement, closed spaces, and connectiveness in the favor of movement, openness, and autonomy" (*Absence* 19). Méndez's response to the confinement of the garden and her desire to escape is to declare her two assets: a body and a soul.

> Un cuerpo tengo, heredado
> de otras vidas y otros cuerpos,

y un alma libre tan mía
que no sé como la tengo,
alma que pulsa los limites…
Horizontes… y desvelos… (9-14)

With this combination of body and soul, Méndez presents an embodied identity which provides her with hope. The poetic voice's body does not exist alone but is connected to and emanates from the lives and bodies of others, presumably her parents and ancestors. Perhaps this sense of bodily connection is related to the strong physical connection to her infant that the poetic voice expresses in previous poems. In contrast, her soul is free and hers alone. The poetic voice's surprise at having a unique and free soul emphasizes her self-possession in addition to her sense of bodily connection to others. In the following verses, this soul allows her to challenge the limits placed upon her. In her insistence on having a connected body and her own free soul, Méndez links her identity not to her grief or the gloomy garden that confines her, but to her body and her soul.

In *Niño y sombras*, Méndez's concept of the soul is informed by Catholicism but is not completely orthodox. Instead of the Christian God, it is the mother who forms and even conceives the soul of the child in Poems 2 and 4. Méndez credits the mother with the power create the child's soul from her own in verse two of Poem 2: "Se repartió mi alma para formar tu alma," and in verse three of Poem 4 "Fue:" "mi alma concibió la tuya." On the other hand, Méndez reiterates the dualistic idea that the person consists of the physical mortal body and the eternal soul. In Poem 19, she emphasizes the independence and freedom of her soul, so much so that it can surpass the obstacles in her path.

The theme of freedom and the importance of body and spirit to her identity are also present in Poem 26, "Yo sé." Méndez expresses that her sense of the self is grounded in her corporality, her blood, and her free will. After listing other poetic topics, Méndez proclaims:

> quiero hablar de mí, sóla
> frente al mundo distante,
> porque llevo en mis ríos
> la sangre que me riega
> y la voluntad mía
> me lleva donde quiero." (30-35)

In this important passage Méndez declares herself to be worthy of poetic expression. She describes herself as on her own, facing a distant and indifferent world. The poetic voice asserts that she is a valid subject for her creative work because she is human, alive, and has a will of her own. In Poem 19, as the poetic voice receives strength passed down to her through her body, and in "Yo sé," her body is sustained by the blood flowing through her veins. In previous poems, the mother formed the child through the gift of her blood. Blood forms a conduit of connection between the generations of mothers and children. In Poem 19, the poetic voice's soul is free and gives her hope to transcend her limits, and in "Yo sé," the poetic voice declares that her will transports her to her desired destination. In her quiet declaration of defiance against poetic fashion and the indifference of the world, Méndez makes a strong statement regarding the importance of embodiment, connection, and spirit in her conception of her identity. The next section of this chapter will further explore the importance of connection and the relational element of the maternal identity.

The Relational Maternal Identity and the Mother-Child Connection

In addition to embodiment, Méndez articulates the relational element of maternal identity in the poems of *Niño y sombras*. Her maternal identity is formed in direct relationship to her child, and this identity as a mother cannot be separated from the infant who developed in her womb. Therefore, she emphasizes this relationship as part of her claim for a maternal identity. Méndez demonstrates this connection in three different ways. First, she establishes that she had a connection to the child before birth. One clear indication of this relationship is her addressing the child directly in five poems. Méndez also characterizes the connection between them in terms of blood and soul therefore intertwining her physical and spiritual being with her child's. Then, she comments on the interactions she had with the child in her womb. At times, she makes comments about her interaction with him in her dreams. Second, she conveys poetically the powerful loss of that connection when separated from him by death. She attempts to restore this connection in dreams or through a longing to join the child in the afterlife. Third, she promises an enduring connection through her motherly relationship with the child even after death. This persistent relationship allows Méndez to support the concept of herself as a mother and thus, her maternal identity.

Through her spoken connection with her child, Méndez provides most straightforward evidence of the relational element of her maternal identity. Five poems of the anthology—the first four poems and the seventh poem—are clearly addressed to her infant and establish a dialogue with him. In these poems, the addressee *tú* is the child, and the poetic voice speaks directly to him as indicated by the second person singular personal pronouns, object pronouns, possessive pronouns and verb forms.

Poems 2, 3, and 4 indicate the addressee with verb form and possessive pronouns, for example: “tu cuerpo” (Poem 2, 1), “Ibas” (Poem 3, 1), “la tuya” (Poem 4, 3). In Poems 1 and 7 (“Niño perdido”), Méndez uses a noun of direct address making the addressee clear for the reader and calling attention to this spoken connection. In the first poem, Méndez addresses him as “niño” in the first verse: “Hacia qué cielo, niño,” (1). At the end of this poem, Méndez closes with another direct address to the child, calling him “mi niño” and thus expressing more affection and possessiveness with the use of the possessive pronoun: “porque estás tú, mi niño” (24). In Poem 7 “Niño perdido”, Méndez interposes a direct address in the first stanza calling out to him: “oh niño perdido” (4). Thus, Méndez clarifies to whom she is speaking and heightens the reader’s sense of pathos.

As mentioned in the previous section on embodiment, Méndez emphasizes her physical relationship with the infant while he was still alive and in the womb. In the first poem, she underscores the centrality of the child and her physical connection with him referring to him as “Tú, sangre de mi sangre/ centro de mi universo” (9-10). One aspect of their connection originates from the physiological reality of pregnancy, that the mother and child share blood while he is in the womb. In the second poem, Méndez expands upon this blood connection as her blood is given to create his body: “Se desprendió mi sangre para formar tu cuerpo” (1). A portion of her blood separates from the whole in order to bring the child into being creating a biological and fluid connection between the mother and child. In Poem 4 “Fue,” Méndez again describes the role of the mother’s blood in defining the infant’s form: “Mi sangre fué después / a señalar con pulso / preciso tu contorno” (7-9). In these verses, the mother’s blood

reveals the shape of the child, connecting mother and child with the rhythm of the pulse. In Poem 7 "Niño perdido," Méndez once again evokes the blood connection with the child: "oh niño perdido / tierna flor de sangre!" (4-5). This lost child is imagined as a delicate flower formed from blood, the blood that she gave to him. In response to his vulnerability, the poetic voice extends her hand to the child: "Para tí mi mano / caliente de amores" (6-7). She seeks to maintain a physical connection and relationship with her child.

Complementing the blood connection with the child, Méndez also asserts the existence of a spiritual connection to the child from the time of conception. In the second poem, the poetic voice explains to the child that, much like her blood, the mother's soul was divided to create his own: "Se repartió mi alma para formar tu alma" (2). This sharing of the mother's soul in order to make the soul of the child forms a spiritual connection between them that is eternal unlike the physical body. Therefore, the mother and child have an enduring spiritual relationship in addition to the temporal physical one.

In Poems 4, "Fue," and Poem 5, Méndez refers both to the relationship between the mother and child's souls and to a nonmaterial space "un más allá" where the child exists prior to birth and after death (Poem 5 5). In the fourth poem, the spiritual connection precedes the material connection. The poem begins revealing that the mother's soul conceived the child's soul:

> Fué más allá del sueño,
> en otra realidad no compartida
> donde mi alma concibió la tuya.
> Al limbo oculto de esas claridades
> por ruta de misterio caminando
> hacia tí me acerqué con tu alborada. (1-6)

Méndez again establishes a direct role in the creation of the child's soul and therefore an enduring connection to him beginning well before birth. Méndez sets the spiritual conception of the child in a mysterious, yet real, space beyond dreams. In the next verses she refers to this space as limbo. In limbo or the place beyond dreams, the poetic voice's soul not only conceives the child's soul, but it also can move through the space towards him prior to birth. Once again, the dawn represents the possibility of new life, but "alborada" can also refer to a song sung to greet the dawn. Therefore, in one reading of these verses, the mother's soul enters this mysterious space to greet and welcome the child's soul into a new life with a chorus for the dawn continuing her relationship with him. Unfortunately, after the mother's blood materializes the child's body, another dawn, "nueva aurora," returns the child to the place beyond dreams: "te llevó para siempre: / es más allá del sueño / donde has resucitado" (10-13). And so, the child's soul has been resurrected not among the living, but in limbo, the place beyond dreams where the souls reside, and where he was first conceived. And so, the mother's hopes for physical connection and relationship are frustrated, but the spiritual connection returns to its origins.

Méndez presents two different perspectives about the afterlife or "el más allá" in the untitled Poems 1 and 5. In the first poem, Méndez feels a voice calling her and drawing her there:

> Ahora esa voz, que vence,
> del más allá me llama
> más imperiosamente
> porque estás tú, mi niño. (21-24)

The poetic voice explains that she is pulled towards death and the great beyond. Her connection to the child and her desire to be with him is strong enough to entice her to desire her own death so that they could be together.

In Poem 5, Méndez refers both to the soul connection between mother and child and to the "más allá" that separates them. She tells her addressee, her partner, that the child has returned to the place of his origin and has taken her soul with him:

> Ha vuelto adonde estaba;
> de ti se habrá llevado un imposible,
> de mí se llevó el alma.
>
> Le he querido seguir y nada puedo…
> Existe un más allá que nos separa. (1-5)

The poet laments the loss of her soul given to create the child; she has not only lost the child to death, but he has taken her soul with him. Méndez considers her loss greater than that of her partner because he has lost something that he did not consider fully realized. For the poet, her loss is very real because she feels that she has lost an intrinsic part of her body and that part of her soul has been severed from the whole and lost. In the second stanza of Poem 5, Méndez once again regrets her inability to follow her child into death because of the gulf that separates them. The mother's desire is to maintain her relationship with the child even in the face of death, and because of her frustration at the chasm between them, Méndez seeks other means to connect with him.

Méndez presents dreams as another important means of claiming and cultivating a relationship with the child during pregnancy and after his death. Interestingly in her *Memorias*, Méndez discusses the importance of dreams to her mentioning several significant dreams of foreboding and the frequency of her dreams: "Yo sueño mucho, tres o cuatro sueños por noche, y otro más en la siesta de la tarde" (144). In addition,

she also developed an interest in the unconscious from her youth influenced by her reading of Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*: "un primo me regaló en mi juventud *La interpretación de los sueños* de Freud, y me lo estudié" (144-5). Her interest in dreams corresponds to the general fascination expressed by her avant-garde contemporaries, especially the surrealists.

In three poems, Méndez alludes to having an oneiric connection with her child both prior to and after his birth and death. In the very first poem, the poet mentions having this kind of connection with the baby while pregnant. Although she physically could not see the infant in her womb, she claims to have seen him in her dreams: "Yo si te vi en mi sueño / a la luz de cien auroras. / Yo si te vi sin verte" (6-8, sic). Thus, the poet's internal vision allows her to see her child and give testimony of his existence. The poem "Niño perdido," is focused on the mother's dream of searching for the lost child: "Por las avenidas / del sueño te encuentre, / oh niño perdido" (2-4). The poetic voice wishes that she might find her lost child, a "tender flower of blood", among "the avenues of dreams" (5, 2). Martínez Trufero comments that in her grief, the mother "desea crear, aunque sea efímero y falso un mundo onírico en el que 'soñar a su hijo perdido', experiencia que aumenta el sufrimiento al comprobar que jamás volverá a sentirlo como ser real" (270). As Martínez Trufero states, the poetic voice recognizes her search will not be successful as the reality of his death and her deprivation of physical and visual connection with the child are clear in the poem.

In Poem 9, Méndez acknowledges that the dream of her child is broken, "roto el sueño," and that without that dream, she is diminished to be "una sombra entre mortales" (1, 2). Poem 9 expresses poignantly her overwhelming grief and recognition

that the hope to restore her connection to her child through dreams is an impossibility, but she acknowledges the intangibles that remain from her experience of pregnancy—light, anguish, longing, laughter, and tears—with the hope that they will sustain her in her grief (3, 5, 6).

In spite of the untenable nature of her dream connection with the child or the reality that she was not allowed to see or touch him after he was born, Méndez claims an enduring connection with him even after death. The final three verses of the second poem directly speak to this enduring relationship between mother and child. The maternal poetic voice promises to hold the child in her heart and care for him always: "Mi corazón que es cuna que en secreto te guarda / porque sabe que fuiste y te llevó en la vida / te seguirá meciendo hasta el fin de mis horas" (7-9). The conduit for this connection is the mother's embodiment and the child's residence in her body, and so the maternal voice declares that her heart already secretly holds the infant. In the promise that her heart will rock him for the length of her life, Méndez vows to maintain a life-long relationship with the child.

Similarly, at the end of Poem 4, "Fue," the poet again restates her continued connection and devotion to the child. In death, the child returns to the place where his soul was first conceived by the mother and where he is revived:

> y es más allá del sueño
> donde has resucitado
> para quedar ya en mí
> en una eterna lágrima. (12-15)

Paradoxically by returning to his spiritual origins, the dead child also abides in her tear. In these final verses of "Fue," Méndez blurs the lines between death and existence and between separation and connection. While the poetic voice reassures the child of their

enduring connection, she ends the poem with the resonating symbol of the mother's unending grief, "una eterna lágrima," (15).

In Poem 7 "Niño perdido," Méndez also expresses a desire for continued connection with her child and promises to remember him. As discussed in the previous section on embodiment, the poetic voice expresses a persistent desire to care for her child, and this is symbolized by her loving hand— "Para tí mi mano / caliente de amores"—and her search for him "Esta mano mía / que para buscarte" (6-7, 10-11). In the second part of this poem, Méndez acknowledges that her hope for a relationship of the earthly kind, based on the sense of touch and sight, is in vain. Her desire to touch and see her child cannot be fulfilled in the physical world or in her dreams because the opportunity to do so was taken from her. She will not ever reach or touch him: "alcanzar no puede / ni sentir tu carne" (16-17). She will never see his hair or face just as she did not see him at his birth: "Ni vi tu cabello / rubio, ni vi tu semblante" (22-23). In the place of tangible memories, the poet holds onto what others told her about his appearance, and these becomes a part of her memory of the child: "pero me dijeron… y he de recordarte / como aquella estampa …/ cuando me dejaste" (24-25). With "y he de recordarte," Méndez conveys both a sense of obligation to remember her son how he was described to her and of future commitment to remember him. Thus, the poet promises to remember her lost child, maintaining an enduring connection. As the last poem to directly address the child and to deal directly with the events surrounding his birth and death, "Niño perdido" concludes the first part of the collection *Niño y sombras* with a mixture of maternal desire for connection with the child, acknowledgment of its

impossibility because of the tragedy of death, and the promise to remember him, albeit imperfectly.

As with the theme of embodiment, Méndez generalizes from her sense of relationship with her son to a sense of connection with the broader world and the universe. In the final two verses of Poem 3 "Recuerdo," the mother expresses a connection to the world through her blood and the birth of her son: "Ibas a nacer, el mundo / se afianzaba en mi sangre…" (11-12). In the moments before birth, the mother feels the whole world establishes itself within her, gaining strength from her lifeblood. In facing labor and birth, the mother senses a strong connection forged between herself and the world. Similarly, in Poem 17, Méndez ends the poem with an expression of her blood containing the universe: "Siento en mi sangre girar el Universo" (13). Once again the poet's sense of being part of the universe is felt through the heart and blood, the most vital physical elements of human life.

Chapter IV: Grief and the Effects of Perinatal Death on the Maternal Identity

Introduction

After the loss of a child to perinatal death, the mother does not have a child to hold in her arms and show the world so that others will recognize her as a mother. Under these circumstances, it is understandable that the mother's concept of herself as a mother, her maternal identity, would suffer and be threatened. During the forty weeks of waiting and nurturing the fetus developing inside her body, the mother has experienced the physical changes, the discomforts, and vulnerabilities associated with pregnancy. In situations of a wanted pregnancy like Méndez's, she has anticipated and waited for the day of the infant's birth, and she has shared her concerns, worries, hopes, dreams, and fears with the important people in her life—the father, her family, her friends. The day of labor comes, and instead of a healthy baby, the infant is stillborn or dies soon after birth. The mother does not have a baby to hold, nurse, and show to her spouse and anxious visitors. She does not have the proof of her motherhood; her womb and her arms are empty.

In the case of Concha Méndez, her son was stillborn or died immediately after birth, and because of the birth practices of the time, she was not given the chance to see or touch her son. To the outside world, she was not really a mother because she didn't have in her possession the product of her pregnancy and labor, the baby. Yet, Méndez still thought of herself as a mother as evidenced by the poems of *Niño y sombras*. Her poems demonstrate her deep grief and the effects of perinatal death on her identity, but they also argue for her continued identity as a mother.

The following analysis of the poems of *Niño y sombras* will specifically look at the expressions of grief and loss in the poems and the effects of perinatal death on the maternal identity as well as observe the dynamic changes and adaptions in the maternal identity. The analysis will show that although there are observed changes and adaptions in the poet's maternal identity, the poems demonstrate a continued, though changed, maternal identity.

In laying the foundation for the analysis, this introduction first presents definitions of perinatal death and stillbirth for clarification. Then, John Bowlby's "four phases of mourning" and Ronald J. Knapp's parental responses to the death of a child provide knowledgeable perspectives on parental grief in the face of perinatal death. Bowlby and Knapp provide useful insights to inform the analysis of Méndez's poetry. In addition, it is important to identify the cultural practices surrounding pregnancy and perinatal death both from the perspective of scholars and from witnesses such as Carlos Morla Lynch and Concha Méndez herself. The final section of the introduction provides a discussion of the genre of elegy and women's participation in the genre to further inform the analysis of the poems of *Niño y sombras*.

The analysis of the poems of *Niño y sombras* reflects a progressive mourning process moving through the collection, and the analysis is divided into seven sections. The first section examines the initial experience of grief and the crisis in the maternal identity as expressed in the first seven poems. The second section considers the importance of memory to the grief process in Poems 8 and 9. The third section reflects on the poetic meditations on death in Poems 10 and 12. The fourth section examines the examples of disconnection from reality and dissociation found in Poems 11 and 16.

The fifth section analyzes the theme of continued presence in Poems 17 and 20. Then the sixth section reflects on Méndez's shift to a broader concern for the world. Finally, the seventh section presents the evidence of a slow transition from acute mourning to living with grief and a refocus of the poet's maternal identity in Poems 18, 23, 25, and 28.

Perinatal Death and Parental Grief

Perinatal death and stillbirth have specific medical definitions and are the preferred terms in this study. According to Wanda Denise Barfield's report on "Standard Terminology for Fetal, Infant, and Perinatal Deaths" in *Pediatrics,* perinatal death specifies a broad category of mortality including fetal death and neonatal death (177). Although there are variations in the details of how these terms are defined, generally fetal death is when a fetus between 20 weeks' gestation to full-term dies in the womb or before delivery is complete, and stillbirth is an alternative term for fetal death (178). Miscarriage is the death of a fetus that occurs in utero prior to 20 weeks' gestation (178). Neonatal death is when an infant is alive at birth but dies within days or weeks of birth (178). Anette Kersting and Birgit Wagner indicate that stillbirth is so distressing because it is unforeseen: "the fetus has either died before or during labour, often unexpectedly or after an uncomplicated pregnancy" (187). As Kersting and Wagner note, "perinatal losses have also been shown to have substantial psychological impact on parents and families" (188). They observe that the further along the pregnancy, the more ability to feel the movements of the baby, and the more emotional investment the mother has placed in the pregnancy all increase the intensity of yearning and grief the mother experiences: "It is thought therefore, that the more the mother has

experienced or comprehended the reality of the baby the higher the level of grief" (189). In addition, the parents, especially mothers, go through an intense grief process that is complicated by the lack of memories, the absence of ritual to mark the death, and insufficient acknowledgement of the loss by the parent's community and family.

Sioban Murphy, Mark Shevlin, and Ask Elklit in "Psychological Consequences of Pregnancy Loss and Infant Death in a Sample of Bereaved Parents" discuss the prevalence of "depression, anxiety, dissociation, sleep disturbances, somatization, interpersonal sensitivity, and aggression" among parents who are grieving the perinatal or postnatal loss of a child (56). The Perinatal Grief Scale, an assessment tool, identifies "a three-factor structure representing active grief (sadness, missing the baby), difficulty coping (depression and withdrawal) and despair (feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness)" (57). In *Niño y sombras*, Méndez reflects at least the first two features of grief. According to Murphy, Shevlin, and Elklit's definition, Méndez's pregnancy loss could be classified as either perinatal loss which is "death from gestation weeks 28-42 or during birth" or a stillbirth which is "when the infant dies when it is born and occurs prematurely or at full term" (57-58). The authors note the prevalence of anxiety and depression in women following the loss of an infant, but they also discuss the high level of interpersonal sensitivity, "problems that may affect interpersonal relationships … loneliness, isolation, and feeling like one is not getting on with others" (65-66). They point out that others may not know how to comfort the couple and that the parents have their own issues with how "to express those feelings" (66). Other common experiences for parents after perinatal loss are dissociation, "a coping mechanism for avoiding the painful memories of the trauma," and somatic

symptoms especially among mothers, such as "eating problems, sleeping disturbances, headaches, and dizziness" (66). The authors also indicate that aggression and hostility are common reactions to postnatal death of a child as they are in other groups who have experienced trauma (66).

In *Loss: Sadness and Depression* (1980), John Bowlby (1907-1990) theorizes that bereaved adults pass through four normal phases of mourning. Bowlby was an influential British psychologist and attachment theorist, and he was a contemporary of Concha Méndez. It should be noted that Bowlby bases his findings primarily on studies of widows and widowers, but he also observes that among parents who lose a child to perinatal death: "the overall patterns of response are little different to what they are in those who are widowed" (122). Bowlby's four phases of mourning are the "phase of numbing," the "phase of yearning and searching," the "phase of disorganization and despair," and finally the "phase of reorganization" (85). In *Niño y sombras*, it is possible to identify poems that demonstrate characteristics of at least the second and third of Bowlby's phases of mourning, and some that hint at the final phase.

During Bowlby's first two phases of mourning, the grieving person responds to the initial shock of loss and wavers between acceptance of the loss and disbelief. The first "phase of numbing" is brief, possibly lasting up to a week (85). During this period of shocked disbelief, those grieving may vacillate between calmness and sudden outpourings of anguish or anger (85). Once the bereaved moves past the initial numbness, the feelings of sorrow continue into the second "phase of yearning and searching for the lost figure" which can continue for months to years (85). According to Bowlby, the bereaved in the second phase alternates between states of belief and

disbelief about the reality of the death (86). The state of belief is characterized by anguish and "hopeless yearning" while the disbelief is exemplified by a "hope that all may yet be well and by an urge to search for and to recover the lost person" (86). As the bereaved person comes to grasp the truth of the loss, he or she will experience a variety of emotions and behaviors, from crying to "restlessness, insomnia, preoccupation with thoughts of the lost [person]," as well as feeling the person's presence, dreams of the loved one, and anger (85-86). For Bowlby, when a person's grief process is healthy, "the urge to search and to recover, often intense in the early weeks and months, diminishes gradually over time" (87). Gradually the bereaved accept the reality of the loss and shift their attention more to their own situation.

In the third "phase of disorganization and despair," the bereaved become more aware of the voids in their lives even while they have a continued emotional attachment to the deceased. Their grief continues to impact them emotionally and physically, and they often experience isolation and loneliness. Bowlby explains that the bereaved must "discard old patterns of thinking, feeling and acting before new ones can be fashioned" and often experience anguish and depression during this potentially long phase (94). One characteristic of this period is a sense of the "persistence of relationship" with the dead loved one (95). A year after death, about half of the widows and widowers commonly "retain a strong sense of the continuing presence of their partner without the turmoils of hope and disappointment, search and frustration, anger and blame that are present earlier" (95). For the majority of those experiencing loss of a spouse, this sense of presence was "comforting and helpful" (97). In a similar vein, dreams of the loved one being alive also usually consoled the bereaved although they sometimes may be

distressing (97). Bowlby points out that this persistent sense of attachment allows the widows and widowers to sustain "their sense of identity … and they become able to reorganize their lives along lines they find meaningful (98). On the other hand, during this phase, grief frequently impairs their physical health, and the bereaved suffer from ailments associated with anxiety like "insomnia…, headaches, anxiety, tension, and fatigue" to more serious illnesses (100). In addition, loneliness or isolation is a characteristic of the third phase, and Bowlby differentiates between "emotional isolation," which is alleviated by a relationship or a deep emotional attachment, and "social isolation," which is remedied by friendship and social interaction (102). The move from the "phase of disorganization and despair" to the "phase of reorganization" represents a slow shift in focus from what was lost and the accompanying loneliness and sorrow to a reorganization of the bereaved's life.

During the fourth and final "phase of reorganization," the person grieving goes through a process of reevaluating his or her identity and roles as well as restructuring his or her life. For the bereaved, this phase is marked by "a redefinition" of the self and circumstances within the context of loss (Bowlby 94). For Bowlby, this redefinition is "a process of … reshaping internal representational models so as to align them with the changes that have occurred in the bereaved's life situation" (94). Their new circumstances compel widows and widowers to take on new responsibilities, develop new abilities, and change their patterns of social interaction (94-95). As the bereaved makes the transition to a new life, "the original relationship continues to fill a central role in a bereaved person's life," but even so, the relationship's role also gradually alters its form as the months and years pass (85). Although many, including the bereaved and

health professionals, may expect a quicker recovery from grief, Bowlby warns that it takes two to three years for those who "recover their former state of health and well-being" (101). Therefore, Bowlby urges patience with the process of mourning and the reorganization phase.

Ronald J. Knapp in his book *Beyond Endurance: When a Child Dies* (2005) identifies six prevalent responses parents have to the death of a child. All of these responses can be found in Concha Méndez's poems from *Niño y sombras*. To begin with, the bereaved parents will often express a promise "to never forget" the child indicating the importance of memory to those grieving (30). The parents also commonly express a "wish to die" in order to be reunited with the child (33). In their effort to understand the child's death, many parents will have "a religious experience" or undergo a renewal of their religious faith, and others will espouse a general "belief in an afterlife" (33-37). The parents demonstrated "a change of values" as they placed more importance on relationships than the material, and they also showed "more tolerance" of others' pain (39-42). Finally, Knapp discusses a chronic "shadow grief" that parents often carry after the death of a child (42-43). The following several paragraphs will expound upon these six responses identified by Knapp so that those responses can be more easily identified in Concha Méndez's poems.

Parents have a deep need to remember their deceased child, and they often fear losing those memories. According to Knapp, most parents who lose a child have "the need or desire never to forget – or to remember always" (30). This promise arises from an important psychological need to remember. The senses are largely important to the creation and retention of memory, and some of the most potent and important

recollections to parents are informed by the senses, specifically the sight, sound, texture, and smell of the child (30-31). When a child dies the parents will yearn for the sensory experience of seeing, touching, hearing, and even smelling the child, and Knapp finds that the parents often "wish to retain [these sensory experiences] in memory for as long as they live" (31). In the case of stillbirth, the parents have a very short time to develop any sensory memories of the baby, and only if they are given the opportunity to see and touch the child. Mothers especially "harbor a great fear that what memories they have of the child may eventually fade away" (30). Unfortunately, many people are reluctant to talk about the death of a child, and the resulting silence may intensify the parents' need to remember. The parents often fear they will forget any experiences they had with the child prior to death, but most importantly they dread forgetting the child (31). Knapp urges practitioners to be open to listen to grieving parents recount their stories because it "is important to help them keep what few memories they have alive and fresh" (32). Therefore, it is important for parents to talk about the child and their loss.

Along with the need to remember, parents often express a death wish that arises from their despair and desire to be reunited with their child. According to Knapp, this is especially true when the death is unexpected and the child is older (33). Unlike in previous generations or in societies with poor health outcomes, lower rates of infant and child mortality have contributed to the perspective that the death of a child is "unnatural" and "unacceptable" (33). As parents struggle to understand the death, they feel hopeless. As Knapp observes, "[t]here appears to be no hope, no way of justifying their lives, no way of continuing on with life without the deceased child" (33). In addition, the parents' attachment to the child can develop into "a blind but

understandable desire to continue to see and caress and love" their dead child even in death (33). The parents wish to escape the pain and anguish caused by being separated from their child through death, and ironically death seems to offer them both an escape and a reunification (33-34).

Furthermore, parents often look to religion in their search to understand their child's death (35). According to Knapp, approximately seventy percent of parents sought solace and meaning from their faith traditions, but only about thirty percent of parents have a "genuine religious revitalization or conversion experience" (36-37). Instead, some parents come to believe in an afterlife and "some sort of reunification with the child after the parent's own death" (37). This general belief in an afterlife is not necessarily consistent with a Western or Christian concept of "heaven" (37). As Knapp explains, parents unable to conceive of a permanent separation from the child "came to accept this vague idea of an afterlife and began to envision their child residing *there* in a state of peace and comfort" (emphasis original, 38). In short, both religious faith and a belief in an afterlife provide comfort for many of these grieving parents.

Along with renewed religious beliefs, the perspectives, goals, and values of grieving families often are transformed by the experience of losing a child. According to Knapp, families that have lost a child, especially to a long-term illness, tend to shift their focus from pursuing material concerns and maintaining appearances to nurturing familial relationships and bonds (39-40). Through their experience with death, the families become more aware of human vulnerability and the fragility of life, and this awareness then informs their social interactions (41). Knapp specifies that parents had developed greater compassion, understanding, forgiveness, patience, openness about

their feelings, and ability to show love (41). These parents also showed a higher level of tolerance of others than before as a result of greater sensitivity and compassion for another's pain and distress (42). This shift in values to a more tolerant and compassionate attitude towards others is a positive legacy of their loss.

Lastly, many families mourning a child will experience a chronic form of grief Knapp calls "shadow grief" (43). As Knapp describes it, "shadow grief" is "a dull ache in the background of one's feelings," and it is characterized by sporadic episodes of emotion, such as crying, sorrow, or unease (43). Unfortunately, the grief of parents may continue indefinitely, and "mothers who suffered perinatal losses" are particularly susceptible to the "lingering effects of grief" (43). In other words, parents, especially mothers, who lose a child often experience a persistent, chronic grief. Many of the lingering effects of grief identified by Knapp, as well as Bowlby's four phases of mourning, can help us comprehend the processes, thoughts, and feelings found in the poetic voice of Méndez' *Niño y sombras*.

Cultural Practices of Pregnancy and Perinatal Death

In Western Europe and the United States during the 20th century until the 1980s, it was normal hospital procedure in the case of perinatal death to prevent the mother and father from seeing the baby and to provide them only minimal information. As Kersting and Wagner in "Complicated Grief after Perinatal Loss" and Begoña Martínez Trufero in her dissertation chapter "El duelo de la madre como proceso de reafirmación de la identidad. *Niño y sombras* (1936)" indicate, it is now considered best practice to allow the mother to see and hold an infant who is stillborn or who dies after birth although this is not without controversy (189, 271). In the article "The Psychological

Miscarriage," Sarah Lloyd Jones notes that the loss of the baby to miscarriage or perinatal death comes at a time during which the mother identifies with and is deeply focused on the baby, and because the mother has few memories or tangible reminders, the normal searching impulse experienced in mourning is frustrated and compromised by hospital practices which prevent mother-infant contact and anonymize remains (434, 436-437). Martínez Trufero states that the mother's grief process is benefited by this contact: "prevalece la idea de que aquellas madres que se han despedido de sus hijos viendo y tocándolos, asumen el duelo de manera más positiva y con una duración más corta que aquellas que no" ("El duelo" 271). According to Ana Pía López García de Madinabeitia in her article "Duelo perinatal" and Sonia M[a] Pastor Montero, et al. in the study "Experiencias y vivencias de los padres y profesionales ante la pérdida perinatal," Spain unfortunately lags behind other Western nations in providing the clinical practices and emotional support that parents need to best face perinatal loss.

In the 1980 edition of *Loss: Sadness and Depression*, John Bowlby notes that when a stillbirth occurs, "Supposing it to be for the best, the [hospital] staff quickly remove all evidence of the dead baby and dispose of the body without funeral in a common grave. Often little information is given the parents and the whole episode [is] veiled in silence" (122-123). Because of the silence of the staff and their inability to have contact with the infant and to ritualize their grief with a funeral, "the parents are faced, as [Emanuel] Lewis remarks, with a non-event and with no one to mourn" (Bowlby 123). The reality of pregnancy and the experience of feeling a living fetus in the womb comes into emotional and cognitive conflict with the reality of death and loss in the experience of stillbirth. Without some form of contact with the infant, the

formation of memories to make both the child and the death concrete for the parents, and some form of ritual to help the parents and their community recognize the significance of the child and his or her death, the parents, especially the mother, may find it difficult to move through the grief process.

In "Duelo perinatal: Un secreto dentro de un misterio," Ana Pía López García de Madinabeitia reviews the history of hospital and cultural practices concerning perinatal loss in Spain. She maintains that in the 1950s and 1960s hospital staff treated stillbirth also as "no-suceso" and protected the mother and father from seeing or holding the baby (58). As an example of Catholic funerary practices in Spain, López García summarizes the *Atlas etnográfico de Vasconia: Ritos del nacimiento al matrimonio* by José Miguel Barandiarán and Ander Manterola, stating: "Se creía que los niños muertos sin bautizar iban al Limbo, lugar donde 'ni se sufre, ni se padece, ni se tiene alegría'" (54). In addition, the section of the cemetery designated for stillborn babies was also referred to as "Limbo" (54). Regarding the burial, López García adds that "El entierro se realizaba sin oficio religioso, ante pocos familiares y en ausencia de la madre, y no se rezaba ningún responso" (54). As a result, the isolation the parents experienced and the lack of religious rituals contributed to prolonged grief (57). López García cites the important work of Kirkley-Best and Kellner in 1982 that called for a change in hospital policies recommending that parents be allowed to see and hold the deceased infant and that support groups be organized for the bereaved parents (59). In spite of these recommendations, perinatal grief continues to receive in Spain "una escasa consideración social y sanitaria," and they are decades behind other countries in implementing reforms in nursing practices to better care for the bereaved parents and

respect how they express their grief (66). For López García, the taboos preventing the discussion of "la muerte, el sexo y la reproducción" continue to perpetuate an environment of secrecy that prevents couples from talking about their experiences of perinatal loss and receiving appropriate support (57).

Carlos Morla Lynch, a close friend of the couple, gives some insight into Méndez's labor and the atmosphere surrounding it in his memoire "En España con Federico García Lorca." Morla Lynch and the others in the Altolaguirre-Méndez circle of friends were deeply invested in the birth of the couple's first child, calling it "'una cosa nuestra' … como un hijo de la colectividad" (335-38). While Méndez was in active labor in the next room, the men gathered in the couple's apartment holding a *tertulia* that Morla Lynch calls "'el parto literario,'" and they, especially García Lorca, regularly offered her encouragement (336-37). During her long labor at home, Méndez was attended by two young doctors, friends of Altolaguirre, and a nurse, the only woman mentioned in Morla Lynch's account (336). Early the next morning after no progress in her labor, Méndez was taken to the hospital probably for surgery, and later Morla Lynch received the unfortunate news that the child had died (338). Morla Lynch records his feelings of sadness, incomprehension, and being the victim of a terrible joke, and he comments that the longed-for addition to their group, "[e]l angelito, con su coronita de laurel, no ha querido venir, se ha evadido en el último momento; ha preferido a este mundo miserable la blanca *nursery* del limbo" (338).

Morla Lynch's account bears witness to the comradery of their circle and the affection they had for Méndez and Altolaguirre. He provides details of Méndez's labor at home clarifying that she was attended by doctors and a nurse. Regrettably, her labor

was very long and did not progress normally finally sending them to a hospital. Besides the nurse, other women, like her mother or friends, are noticeably absent in Morla Lynch's account.

The poems of *Niño y sombras* give us insight into the maternal experience of pregnancy and birth in 1930s Spain. In Poems 1, 2, 3, and 6, Méndez alludes to common physical experiences of pregnancy: the nine months of discomfort and sleeplessness, the sensations of the baby's movement in her womb, the lonely nature of labor for the mother, and the pain of labor. Unlike later poets, Méndez is rather circumspect and does not reveal many specific details about the birth experience. Rhetorically, these descriptions of the maternal experience indicate to the reader the reality of the poet's motherhood and provide a sense of commonality with other women.

Although in Morla Lynch's version of the experience Méndez was surrounded by friends and professionals, her poems reflect a feeling of isolation and loneliness. Murphy, et al comment that after perinatal death mothers tend to have "increased feelings of loneliness" (66). The poet describes facing birth alone: "La madre va siempre sóla / quien quiera que la acompañe" ("Recuerdo" 3-4). These feelings may be the result of the circumstances of birth, but they also were surely magnified because of the death of her son.

At the hospital, Méndez experiences very similar practices to what Bowlby and López García describe in their studies. These practices in response to a perinatal death isolate the mother physically and emotionally from others and from vital information. After finally giving birth, Méndez is separated from her newborn son who is either stillborn or lives just a short time. As Poems 1, 2, and 7 indicate, she was not allowed

to see or hold her son after his birth, and this caused her great frustration and grief. Because of these circumstances, she doesn't know basic information about his appearance, which becomes a focus for her thoughts and is indicated in Poem 2. Bowlby points out that the desire to hold and see the baby are common among mothers after a perinatal death: "Many mothers express the strongest desire to hold the dead baby" and have "preoccupations with the image of the dead baby and dreams about him" (122). For Martínez Trufero, these unfulfilled needs prevent the mother from "redefinir su identidad y resolver sus complejas emociones" ("El duelo" 270).

In addition, Méndez must rely on what others tell her about her child, and the information she receives is inadequate and sometimes unreliable. For example, Altolaguirre initially tries to shield her from the baby's death saying the baby was alive, but the nurse tells her the truth: "Al año de casados tuvimos un niño, que murió al nacer; se hubiera llamado Juan. Manolo quiso hacerme creer que el niño vivía para que yo no sufriera; y entonces me encontraba en una angustia terrible: él que me decía que vivía, y la enfermera, que había muerto" (*Memorias habladas* 92). As Méndez indicates here, the contradictory messages from her husband and the nurse reflect a tendency to shield patients, especially women, from medical information and bad news, because of a woman's perceived emotional vulnerability. In the case of stillbirth or infant death, that emotional vulnerability is understandable and expected, but the withholding of the truth and inconsistencies cause even more trauma. Murphy et al point out that there is a connection between the symptoms of perinatal loss, i.e. "interpersonal sensitivity, aggression and hostility, and somatization," and trauma, including PTSD (60). Ultimately for Méndez, the separation from the body of her baby

has devastating effects on her and stymies her grief process. As evidenced by the poems of *Niño y sombras,* Méndez expresses deep grief at the loss of her child and possibly a depression. In spite of this, the mother remains connected to the child even after death.

The Genre of Elegy

Today the term elegy refers primarily to a poetic lament, but it originates from the classical Greek meter *elegeia*, or elegiac couplets (Braden and Fowler, "Elegy" 559). Classical elegists were not limited to the topic of grief, and they also wrote love and pastoral poems using the elegiac couplets (559-6). Strand and Boland explain that when lamenting a death an elegy's primary purpose is to express grief for the deceased, and in doing so it typically presents "the circumstances and character of a loss… lists his or her virtues, and seeks consolation beyond the momentary event" ("The Elegy" 167). Elegy is predominantly a lyric genre of poetry and is traditionally characterized by rhetorical devices such as "apostrophe, exclamation, pathetic fallacy, epideixis, pastoral topoi, allusion, epitaph" (Braden and Fowler 560). However, many twentieth and twenty-first-century poets have questioned and even rejected the traditional characteristics of the elegy, especially the purpose of seeking or providing consolation.

The terms lament, dirge, and *endecha* are related to the elegiac genre and are pertinent to this analysis. In general, the term lament conveys an expression of grief, but it is also a specific term for a poetic song mourning the death of a person. A dirge is also a song of grief specifically "sung at the funeral ceremony, at the procession, or afterward…[and] developed out of Greek funerary songs, particularly the *epicedium*, the song sung over the dead, and the *threnos*, sung in memory of the dead" (Hornsby

and Brogan, "Dirge" 523). *Endecha* is the Spanish term for a lament or dirge typically with pentasyllabic, hexasyllabic, or heptasyllabic poetic verses and assonant rhyme in the even lines of the poem, although "any simple rhyme scheme in true rhyme and any type of verse may be used, since the name refers primarily to subject matter" (Clarke, "Endecha" 575).

Although scholars identify a variety of types of elegies, three are pertinent to this discussion and are distinguished by their functions. First, some elegies, such as memorial and pastoral elegies, serve a public function in mourning a known figure. Second, other elegies, sometimes called private, funeral or personal elegies, are written to mourn a family member or friend and are often intended to be shared within a small circle, and thus have a private function. Third, contemplative or philosophical elegies often reflect upon mortality and question an aspect of the writer's time or society. Strand and Boland emphasize the elegy's public function in the expression of grief on a societal level stating that "the grief the poet expresses is rarely a private one" since elegy combines the cultural customs surrounding death with personal emotions ("The Elegy" 167-8). On the other hand, John Vickery in *The Modern Elegiac Temper* and Paula Backscheider in her chapter "The Elegy" acknowledge the importance of the private, personal elegy. Although she was not following the conventions of the canonical pastoral or memorial elegy, Concha Méndez's *Niño y sombras* as a whole is an elegy that combines poems of the personal elegy for her son with contemplative poems that mourn the state of her world in 1933. Even so, *Niño y sombras* performs a public function because Méndez published these poems and brought them into the

public forum. Thus, she presented a mother's private grief and a poet's concern for her world as worthy of public consideration.

Controversy about women's production of elegies originated from the distinctions between the public and private functions of the elegy as well as between high culture forms like the pastoral elegy and more popular forms such as the private funeral elegy. According to Jahan Ramazani in the *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney,* elegies were potentially hazardous to the early twentieth-century woman poet's reputation (21). Because the genre was considered to be "'masculine' as an élite literary form yet 'feminine' as a popular cultural form and simulation of mourning," the woman elegist took the risk of blemishing her literary reputation with the label of "'the poetess' or 'nightingale' at a time when securing literary credentials required that she shun it" (Ramazani 21). The poetic aesthetic of the early twentieth-century was influenced by the nineteenth-century stereotype of a "poetess" or *poetisa* who wrote over-sentimental "domestic" poetry, including personal elegies for family members, friends, and children. These women poets and their elegiac poetic production were disdained as inferior and less skilled. Ramazani indicates that male poets were also uncomfortable "crossing into a sphere socially coded as feminine" because their fear of emotional expression led them to avoid sentimental and potentially effeminate expressions of grief (21). Women poets were caught in between the expectation that they restrict their writing to the domestic sphere and the judgment that they were not skillful enough to write public elegies.

Paula Backscheider and Anita Helle provide insight into these restrictions on women's participation in the elegiac genre. In her book chapter "The Elegy" from

Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry, Backscheider asserts that British women poets wrote in all of the elegiac categories of "the lament, the memorial, the pastoral, the classical (which included love elegies), and the English contemplative," and excelled in their art, but the pastoral elegy proved to be less accessible for women poets (271-272, 276). The pastoral elegy is a highly literary, formal poetic form with specific conventions and a tendency towards artifice, and it is a form that was more respected by the literary elite (277). Backscheider attributes women poets' lack of affinity for the pastoral elegy to its artifice, the theme of succession in which the poet promotes himself as the successor of his deceased friend, and the melancholic form of mourning that was gendered male at the time (277). For women poets, it was problematic to replicate the pastoral poet's positioning himself as the successor of the poetic or "heroic genealogy" (277). In addition, eighteenth-century poets presented "melancholy" as a masculine expression of grief and then associated melancholy with creativity which in turn established specific gender stereotypes about how men and women mourned (277). Therefore, because the pastoral elegy was seen as a high culture and masculine form of the genre, women poets were channeled towards the private funeral or personal elegy as a feminine and popular poetic form (277).

In her survey of "Women's Elegies, 1834-Present: Female Authorship and the Affective Politics of Grief," an article in *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, Anita Helle explains how the "gendered politics of mourning" have changed from the nineteenth century (465). Women's poetic elegies and other writings about sorrow have been judged harshly because in contrast with the preference for emotional reserve and rationality of men's elegiac writing, women's works were assumed to be excessively

sentimental, insincere in their feeling, and of lower quality (465-466). The negative connotations for the term poetess reflect that opinion. On the other hand, poetesses were catering to the marketplace with "popular women's elegies, and especially child elegies heavily laced with maternal sorrow, pain, and suffering" (465). Helle points out that scenes "of suffering, embodied in figures of tender sympathetic witnesses, especially the figure of the suffering mother and the often endangered child" in nineteenth-century novels had great power to influence both other characters and the readers for good (466).

In addition to the sub-genres of family and child elegies, women were also writing contemplative elegies on national and societal issues. In the twentieth century, women poets faced additional censure of their expression of emotion from "an aggressive masculinist assault on sentimental discourse" from Modernists like Ezra Pound (468-469). Helle claims that in their elegies modernist and vanguardist women integrate the expression of sentiment with the aesthetic experimentation of their time. Helle presents Mina Loy, a contemporary of Concha Méndez, as an example of an Anglo-American woman modernist who wrote poems of mourning for the death of a child as well as memorial and contemplative elegies (469). Helle emphasizes Loy's "materialization and embodiment of grief" in her elegiac poems (470). In addition, Loy's poetry questions the elegy's ability to provide consolation and resolution for the bereaved and contests the Freudian theory that art can compensate for the loss or that it can replace the one lost (270). Helle also confirms the connection between maternal mourning and poetic subjectivity (477). In conclusion, women poets, instead of being

locked into the high culture elegiac forms, have reshaped the elegy for their own expression of grief both at a personal level but also to reflect on societal concerns.

In "Concha Méndez Cuesta: Memoria, duelo y redención elegíaca," Margaret Persin discusses the intertwined themes of loss, grief, and memory in the genre of elegy. She clarifies how Concha Méndez's poetry of lament belongs to this elegy. Méndez takes part in the elegy tradition by first writing about personal grief from "una postura 'femenina' ante el duelo," but she also risked being labeled a "poetisa" from the patriarchal perspective (88). Echoing Ramazani, Persin asserts that since the classic elegy was a lament or meditation written by male poets for the public sphere, women poets were limited to the "domestic elegy" intended for the private sphere (86-87, Ramazani 21-22). But early twentieth-century poets like Concha Méndez destabilized these distinctions: "la mujer poeta contemporánea manipula y subvierte la forma clásica de la elegía" appropriating the genre and its discourse for her own purposes in order to deal with the grief of losing a loved one but also the sorrow of losing parts of one's self, and the pain of experiencing oppression as a woman (Persin 87).

In the classic tradition of the elegy, its purpose is to encourage acceptance of death through a combination of idealization of the deceased, evocation of nostalgia, and consolation for one's grief (Persin 88). According to Persin, *Niño y sombras* is an elegy but different from other domestic elegies because "en este poemario la poeta no encuentra ni nostalgia por el ser querido perdido, ni consuelo" (88). Therefore, Persin classifies *Niño y sombras* as a modern elegy characterized by what Ramazani calls

"melancholic mourning[1]," the poetic expression of grief that does not seek to be consoled or to heal (88).

In my opinion, Persin presents a convincing argument for identifying *Niño y sombras* as an elegy. Méndez's poems trace the early process of her grief, do not hide or objectify the grief, and resist both acceptance of death and consolation. However, in stating that Méndez "no encuentra… nostalgia por el ser querido perdido," Persin seems to disregard her own identification of two key characteristics of Méndez's later poetry, including *Niño y sombras*: "uno que mira hacia el pasado con nostalgia y hasta con melancolía por medio de la memoria; y el segundo, el elegíaco" (81). My analysis demonstrates that although Méndez laments her lack of concrete visual and tactile memories of her son, she relies on her embodied memories of pregnancy and the sensations of being connected to him.

Most importantly, Persin recognizes that the poems of *Niño y sombras* represent the process and work of mourning rather than an expression of relief from sorrow. Through the therapeutic act of writing the poems themselves, Concha Méndez's is doing the working out of her grief: "los poemas que caben bajo esta rúbrica del duelo … hacen el trabajo mismo del duelo" (82). Méndez processes and integrates her grief through her creative act and produces poems that "representan el proceso dinámico de una mente muy creadora" in a struggle to understand and survive the experiences that have caused her sorrow (82). Therefore, the poet's experience of grief becomes transformed into an artistic interpretation (84).

[1] Persin is quoting Jahan Ramazani's *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*, page xi.

Although one might argue that the creative product can be a substitute or compensation for the deceased, like Helle, I argue that for Méndez the poems of *Niño y sombras* do not provide adequate compensation for the child she lost nor can they substitute for him. As the analysis in this chapter reveals, Méndez's expression of her depression or melancholia in the second part of the collection argues against any consolation or compensation. Rather, I agree with Persin that *Niño y sombras* is a poignant poetic reflection of Méndez's mourning process.

Niño y sombras is a modern elegy in its melancholic stance and in its resistance to patriarchal codes of silence and private mourning. The collection reflects Romantic expressiveness and sensibilities and also advances towards more confessional poetry reflective of real human experience, like *poesía impura*. Before its time in its intimacy, *Niño y sombras* foreshadows the intense elegies that follow the Spanish Civil War, for example the *Cancionero y romancero de ausencia* of Miguel Hernández and *Hijos de la ira* by Dámaso Alonso. In *Niño y sombras*, Méndez is tipping the balance to a more intimate, emotionally expressive poetry reflecting the humanity in the experience of maternal grief. In spite of the risk that she would be further marginalized as a female poet, Méndez published *Niño y sombras* in an act of bringing her private sorrow into the public square.

Analysis

Fresh Grief: Searching and Yearning for the Child in Poems 1-7

From the first poem of *Niño y sombras*, Méndez expresses deep grief at the loss of her child and indicates that the loss has thrown her maternal identity into crisis. In

Poem 1, the maternal poetic voice mourns both the death of the child and his physical absence. According to Catherine Bellver, in poetry the expression of "[a]bsence corresponds to the symbolic transformations of personal feelings of loss, unfulfilled desire, and emptiness" (*Absence* 11). In other words, the absence in the poem symbolizes loss. In Poem 1, the absence of the beloved child triggers in the maternal poetic voice expressions of the yearning and "intense pining" as well as the impulse to search for the lost child that Bowlby describes as part of the second phase of mourning (Bowlby 86). Méndez's verses of lament correspond with this yearning while other verses reflect the need to search for the lost loved one.

In Poem 1, Méndez grieves for her lost child and laments being abandoned. This abandonment and the pain of her sorrow are represented by images of emptiness and absence. The poem opens with the *ubi sunt* topos as the poetic voice asks the infant where he went upon leaving her:

> ¿Hacia qué cielo, niño,
> pasaste por mi sombra
> dejando en mis entrañas
> en dolor, el recuerdo? (1-4)

Méndez's opening question signals to the reader an overall theme of the certainty yet inexplicable nature of death since, as Miró comments, the question, *ubi sunt*, has no answers (42). Méndez's question reflects her sense of being abandoned, the unexpectedness of a child dying before a parent, and her own uncertainty about the afterlife. The question also indicates the searching impulse associated with disbelief from Bowlby's second phase of mourning. In addition, these four verses indicate the yearning for the lost loved one that is also experienced during the second phase of mourning. In the third and fourth verses, the poetic voice completes the question

complaining that the infant left only a memory in her aching womb. Instead of a child to hold, the poet has been left with emotional and physical pain and a memory as well as an empty womb and empty hands.

While Méndez refers to a physical memory of the infant in the womb at the beginning of the Poem 1, the poetic voice recalls the memory of a dream in the next portion.

> No vieron luz tus ojos.
> Yo si te vi en mi sueño
> a luz de cien auroras.
> Yo si te vi sin verte[2]. (5-8)

In an oblique reference to her failure to "dar a luz," or to birth the infant into the light, Méndez contrasts the child's inability to see light with her brilliantly lit oneiric vision of him. The antithesis of "Yo sí te vi sin verte" contrasts the act of seeing him in the dream with her inability to see him outside of the womb (8). Yet both the repetition and the hyperbole about the brilliance of the light allow Méndez to emphatically claim that the dream gave her a clear vision of her son. This assertion has several functions. First, she lays claim to a visual memory of her child which helps to counteract her sense of the loss. As Knapp specifies, memory is one of the common preoccupations for bereaved parents as they try to hold on to what they have left of their dead child (30). Second, this repeated affirmation asserts her claim to motherhood and to the child in spite of their separation.

The following four verses of Poem 1 lament the child's absence, evoke memory, and once again assert the poetic voice's maternal claim on him. Emphasizing that the

[2] The unaccented "si" in verses six and seven of Poem 1 is an example of the typesetting irregularities found in *Niño y sueños*. In a later printing of the poem in *Las dos orillas: Concha Méndez: Antología poética*, published by Joaquín Mortiz in Mexico in 1976, this error is corrected to be "sí" with an accented "i." This clarifies the ambiguity of meaning in the first edition of the poem.

maternal poetic voice saw her own son, the addressee, in her vision, she declares that it was:

> Tú, sangre de mi sangre,
> centro de mi universo,
> llenando con tu ausencia
> mis horas desiguales. (9-12)

These four verses are a touching expression of nostalgic yearning for her son and correspond to Bowlby's second phase. However, Méndez's omission of the verb *estar* and any clear indication of verb tense complicate the interpretation of these verses. Even so, Méndez consistently uses the preterit tense until the last four verses of the twenty-two verse poem, and consequently these verses appear to indicate the mother's experience of the passage of time in the past, prior to birth. Therefore, in her memory of pregnancy, the child in the womb is both present and absent to the mother: "llenando con tu ausencia" (11). During pregnancy, the child fills the mother's abdomen, but her arms remain empty. As the mother adapts to her pregnancy and her changing identity, thoughts and anticipation of the child's birth fill her time "mis horas desiguales" (12). The dichotomy of absence and presence in these verses indicate changes in the maternal identity, especially when contrasted with the next portion of the poem.

The most poignant expressions of loss and yearning in Poem 1 are in the next five verses. The poetic voice returns to the theme of the child's physical absence, and the poet laments that she never experienced the touch of the baby's hand or the sight of his face:

> Y despues[3], tu partida
> sin caricia posible
> de tu mano chiquita,

[3] In *Las dos orillas: Concha Méndez: Antología poética* (1976), this typographical error is corrected to be "después."

sin conocer siquiera
la sonrisa del ángel. (13-17)

Paradoxically, the occasion of the infant's birth is also the moment of his departure, or "partida," from the mother's body and this life. These verses reveal that the infant was taken from the mother at birth before she had a chance to see or touch him. The separation by death and human intervention deprives the mother of two important pathways to knowing her child, touch and sight. Knapp confirms how important the sensorial experiences are to the parent's memory and grief process (*Beyond endurance* 31). Méndez is not alone in yearning for a caress from her son, for Bowlby observes that mothers often have "the strongest desire to hold the dead baby" (*Loss* 122). As the maternal poetic voice expresses regret she never felt the caress of his hand or saw his smile, she laments not knowing her baby son, even as an angel. Although these are conventional and sentimental images, Méndez's use of the diminutive "chiquita" and the reference to "la sonrisa del ángel" emphasize the pathos of the moment. The sentimentality is counterbalanced by the complex and unconventional imagery in the poem.

As the poem continues, Méndez associates the infant's departure with her own emptiness. The poetic voice reproaches the child for the emptiness of her hands and the silence of her blood. As explored in the previous chapter, these images reference the mother's embodiment but they also express her profound loss. The mother's hands after birth should be filled with her infant, but the poetic voice's hands are empty because of the child's death and the imposed separation: "¡Qué vacio dejaste, / al partir, en mis manos! (18-19). This absence translates to a deep silence felt in her blood: "¡Que silencio en mi sangre!" (20). Thus, absence and silence are physically

experienced by the poetic voice. The child's absence is apparent through the mother's empty hands, and the silence is felt in her blood. But, the mother is not silent. She cries out in her grief through her poems.

In the final verses of Poem 1, Méndez contrasts the silence of the blood with the voice from the beyond. The poetic voice also alludes to a desire to die which Knapp has identified as a grief response resulting from the desire to escape the pain of loss and to be reunited with the child (*Beyond Endurance* 33-34). The child's absence causes the mother to feel drawn to the great beyond:

> Ahora esa voz…
> del más allá me llama
> más imperiosamente
> porque estás tú, mi niño. (21-24)

Méndez's vague concept of the "más allá" coincides with the belief in the afterlife that Knapp observes in parents (*Beyond Endurance* 37). This belief in an afterlife compensates for the pain of separation because the parents can visualize their child in a safe place and a place of reunion (37-38). Méndez certainly asserts a desire to be reunited with her child in these verses. She also articulates in Poem 1 the all-encompassing nature of loss and absence, and the accumulation of the images of lack, loss, and emptiness effectively express the mother's grief.

Poem 2 relates Méndez's grief at the loss of her son and communicates three central messages to him and the reader. First, Méndez states the strength of her connection to her child through all that she gave to create his life, and therefore makes a claim for her motherhood. Second, she again laments his death and her lack of concrete knowledge of his appearance and thus acknowledges the crisis in her maternal identity. These first two central themes of the poem indicate that the mother is in Bowlby's

second phase of mourning. The mother is yearning for her child and going over in her mind their connections and the memories she does or does not have of him. Poem 2 also highlights the importance of memory to grieving parents (Knapp 30-32). In addition, Méndez alludes to what Bowlby identifies as a sense of the "continuing presence" of the deceased loved one (95). Thus finally, she reiterates the strength of her maternal connection to her son through her promise to continue to nurture him.

The first stanza of Poem 2 traces the parallel development of Méndez's maternal identity and the unborn infant's development. In order to create new life, the mother gives of her own life forces and forges a connection with her son.

> Se desprendió mi sangre para formar tu cuerpo.
> Se repartió mi alma para formar tu alma
> Y fueron nueve lunas y fue toda una angustia
> de días sin reposo y noches desveladas. (1-4)

In conception the mother's blood and soul are split to fashion the child. Then, she goes through the nine moons of pregnancy when she gives time, comfort, and sleep to the gestational process, experiencing change in her physical body and in her concept of herself. As the infant grows and changes, the mother adapts to the changes in her body and forms a dynamic maternal identity.

By shifting the focus from the experience of pregnancy to that of loss in the second stanza of Poem 2, Méndez articulates the contradictory and confusing experience of perinatal death for the mother. At the moment of birth when the mother anticipates seeing her child for the first time, she instead must face loss: "Y fué en la hora de verte que te perdí sin verte. / ¿De que [sic] color tus ojos, tu cabello, tu sombra?" (5-6). The lack of visual and tactile verification of the child threatens the poet's maternal identity. The mother may question whether the child was real when she

did not see him or touch him. She may question how she can maintain her maternal identity when she does not have a visual memory of him or basic information about his appearance. Bowlby confirms that this focus on the appearance of the deceased child is very common (122). In response to her concerns, the poetic voice asks the child about the color of his eyes, hair, and even shadow. This poignant question highlights the gaps in the mother's knowledge and memory as well as the loss of the certainty over her own maternal identity. Even so, the mother responds to this loss with a promise of continued devotion.

In the final verses of the poem, Méndez responds to the uncertainty of the previous verses by reassuring the child and herself with assertions about their present, past, and future relationship. Just as poet's womb served as an interior cradle before birth, her heart rocks and keeps the child safe in death:

> Mi corazón que es cuna que en secreto te guarda
> porque sabe que fuiste y te llevó en la vida,
> te seguirá meciendo hasta el fin de mis horas. (7-9)

By telling the child that he and his memory are safe within the cradle of her heart, the mother is really reassuring herself about the durability of the current connection she feels with him in spite of having no visual memories. She also forcefully professes knowledge of his existence through her past experience of carrying him. Finally, the poetic voice makes a promise of enduring maternal devotion until she dies. This future commitment includes the promises to care for him and keep him safe represented by the rocking cradle, to always remember him, and to maintain a sense of presence in her heart (Knapp 30, Bowlby 95). Through these promises, Méndez declares her intention to adapt her maternal identity to the reality of his death and to anchor her memory in a physical and emotional connection instead of dwelling on her lack of a visual

knowledge. By focusing on her present, past, and future relationship with the child, these last three verses reinforce the poet's claims of past spiritual, physical, and experiential connections from the first stanza and allow Méndez to assert her maternal identity and her lasting connection with her child.

Poem 3 "Recuerdo" reflects the need of the mother to remember the moments when she knew the child was alive prior to birth. As Knapp points out, mothers are particularly fearful of forgetting a child (Knapp 30). Méndez certainly fears losing the few memories she has of her son, and her poetic reminiscences reaffirm the child's viability before birth and the poet's maternal identity:

> Ibas a nacer, yo sóla
> iba contigo a esperarte
> (La madre va siempre sóla
> quien quiera que la acompañe:
> el mundo es como un desierto
> y el hijo en él un oasis). (1-6)

Méndez's observation about the solitariness of the birth experience is also a reflection of the mother's loneliness in mourning. For the mother whose unborn child is her center, the sense that the world is empty without her son would be magnified after his death and intensify her yearning for him.

In the second half of the poem, Méndez reaffirms the maternal poetic voice's connection to the tangible and material—the sensation of the infant moving in her womb, the solid feeling of the earth, and her blood:

> Caminabas en mi seno,
> mis ojos se hacian más grandes;
> la tierra con mar y cielo
> era más firme que antes.
> Ibas a nacer, el mundo
> se afianzaba en mi sangre… (7-12)

At the beginning of the poem, the maternal voice felt alone as she faced birth, but these verses express powerful bonds and experiences. Méndez focuses on the memory of the infant moving in her womb and her own physical response as an effective anchor and a confirmation he was alive prior to birth. The poet expresses those moments before birth as a time in which the mother senses a powerful connection to the earth under her feet and a strength and stability in her own corporality. Paradoxically the mother feels both alone and profoundly linked to the child, the earth, and the world. Through this memory, Méndez continues to substantiate her maternal identity.

Like Poem 3, Poem 4 "Fue" is also a poem of remembrance in which the maternal poetic voice articulates her loss of spiritual and physical connection with her child. "Fue" explores the life-cycle of the child's soul from conception in a spiritual realm to its development as a fetus and then to death and resurrection in the beyond. Méndez traces this cycle of life within a spiritual dreamscape and emphasizes the spiritual and physical connections between the child and the mother during the process. The embodied and relational aspects of "Fue" are discussed in more detail in Chapter III. Throughout, Méndez continues to affirm the existence of the child as well as her physical and soul connections with him. The poem's emphasis on these connections make the mother's expression of loss at the end of the poem more powerful.

The mother's remembrance of her search for the child's soul in the first half of "Fue" reflects the searching tendency in Bowlby's second phase of mourning (86). In addition, dreams about a deceased child are common among parents (Bowlby 122). Poem 4, "Fue," begins with a reference to mysterious separate reality, "más allá del sueño," where the maternal poetic voice conceived the child's soul:

Fue más allá del sueño,
en otra realidad no compartida
donde mi alma concibió la tuya.
Al limbo oculto de esas claridades,
por ruta de misterio caminando
hacia tí me acerqué con tu alborada (1-6).

In this hidden limbo, the maternal poetic voice searches for the child before he becomes a concrete physical reality. With these verses Méndez emphasizes the mystery of creation and contrasts the hidden nature of limbo with the light which she tried to bring to him.

In the second half of the poem, the maternal voice shifts from searching to the acceptance and yearning that also characterize Bowlby's second phase of mourning (86). The maternal voice first reminds the child that her blood flowed through his body and gave him form, and then she acknowledges the reality of his death:

Mi sangre fué después
a señalar con pulso
preciso tu contorno.
Hasta que nueva aurora
te llevó para siempre;
y es más allá del sueño
donde has resucitado
para quedar ya en mí
en una eterna lágrima. (7-15)

The cycle of creation from soul to fetus to a live infant was disrupted when the infant was spirited away by the dawn. In declaring "te llevó para siempre," the maternal voice acknowledges the permanence of his death and his absence demonstrating acceptance (11). Although his death is permanent, the maternal voice locates the resurrected infant in the place beyond dreams where his soul originated. Thus, Méndez contrasts the physical departure of the infant with his spiritual presence which then becomes manifest in the unending grief of the mother symbolized by "una eterna lágrima" (29). Thus the

grieving mother, pining for her child, promises both an eternal connection with him as well as her endless sorrow.

In Poem 5, Méndez expresses deep grief and frustration at the loss and separation from her son. The five verses of this poem convey to the reader the depth of the poetic voice's loss and her sense of soul-connection to the child.

> Ha vuelto adonde estaba;
> de ti se habrá llevado un imposible,
> de mí se llevó el alma
>
> Le he querido seguir y nada puedo…
> Existe un más allá que nos separa. (1-5)

In the first stanza, Méndez contrasts the amount of loss experienced by the maternal poetic voice and an unnamed addressee. Unlike in the previous poems, the addressee of the poem to whom the poetic voice speaks is not the child; instead it is likely Méndez's husband, Manuel Altolaguirre. The maternal poetic voice bluntly reports to the father that the child has died and then states that the deceased child took from the addressee "un imposible" (2). This "imposible" is the future that could have been but is no longer. From the poetic voice's perspective, the father has only lost a possible future, and as a result she minimizes both the father's contribution and loss in comparison to the mother's. The maternal poetic voice claims a much graver loss; the child has taken her soul, "de mí se llevó el alma" (3). As stated in previous poems, the mother created the child's soul from her own, establishing a special bond between the two of them. In losing her child, the maternal poetic voice has lost a precious part of herself, leaving her feeling maimed.

In the second stanza, the maternal poetic voice expresses her frustrated desire to follow the child into death. The mother's desire to end her life stems from the pain of

losing an essential part of herself, and the desire to be reunited and whole once again. As Knapp indicated, death appears to offer a solution to the pain and separation (33-34). Yet, her death wish is prevented by her inability to end her own life. Abandoned and maimed, she can only contemplate the great gulf of the "más allá" which separates her from her deceased child. This a moving expression of separation, loss, and acceptance suggests that Méndez may have progressed into the third of Bowlby's phases of mourning, that of "disorganization and despair" (94).

Poem 6 entitled "Canción" is at once a lullaby, or *canción de cuna* and a funeral dirge or *endecha*. This is paradoxical combination of genres for a lullaby is intended to sing a child to sleep, and the child referred to in this poem is dead and buried. Yet, the poem has a lyrical song-quality with touches in the refrains that are reminiscent of lullabies. The structure and meter of the poem are also lyrical and correspond closely to the description of an *endecha*, the term for a Spanish funeral song. The *endecha* usually consists of five to seven syllable lines with assonance in the even verses although the meter is flexible given that the topic is the defining element of the genre (Clarke 575).

"Canción" doesn't fully follow the tradition form of the *endecha*, but there are similarities. The poem contains six stanzas of couplets with assonant rhyme in the even verses. The first, third, and fifth couplets have heptasyllabic and octasyllabic verses with examples of both syneresis and synaloepha. The second, forth, and sixth couplets are hexasyllabic and serve as the refrain. The refrain couplets are set within parenthesis, giving the sense that they are an aside or an interior monologue.

In "Canción," Méndez offers up a mother's funeral song for her son, her "arbolillo." She uses the metaphor of a tree seedling which is planted in the earth,

sprouts, and dies to represent the brief life-cycle of the vulnerable, deceased infant. As a whole, "Canción" fluctuates between acceptance of the child's death and the mother's yearning, reflecting a transition between Bowlby's second and third phases. The poem is quoted below in full with analysis following.

> Ya tiene la tierra algo
> que fué mio nueve lunas.
>
> (arbolillo nuevo
> sin ramas ni fruta)
>
> Brotó en mañana florida
> de esperanzas y de luchas.
>
> (pudo ver el sol
> y no vió la luna)
>
> El ángel que lo guardaba
> se durmió en la noche oscura.
>
> (mi arbolillo nuevo
> tuvo triste cuna…) (1-12)

The first couplet of "Canción" states concretely the reality of the child's death and the finality of his burial. The maternal poetic voice articulates the grief of the mother as she faces her tragic loss and the transfer of her child from her womb to inside the earth. She reflects poignantly on the brief nine months she carried her child. Méndez evokes pathos in the reader with the implicit comparison between the bereaved mother and the earth which will contain the infant's body for eternity.

In the first refrain (second couplet), Méndez metaphorically depicts the buried child as a tree seedling. Like an infant, the new seedling is the earliest part of a tree's development to emerge from the earth. It has not yet grown limbs nor can it produce fruit, "sin ramas ni fruta," and is weak and vulnerable.

In the third couplet, the poetic voice describes the infant-seedling's birth, sprouting on a morning full of hopes and struggles. Méndez uses the term "florida" or full of flowers to give the feeling of a fertile spring day (5). Then in the second verse of the couplet, she elaborates on the morning contrasting "esperanzas" with "luchas" (6). "Esperanzas" refer to the mother's hopes for the infant as well as the hopes of the father and everyone else involved. "Luchas" refer to struggles that accompany birth, the struggle of labor and the struggle for life.

In the second refrain (fourth couplet), the poetic voice indicates a short life span for the seedling: "(pudo ver el sol / y no vió la luna)" (7-8). The seedling sprouted in the morning when it could "see" the sun. Yet, it did not "see" the moon, indicating that it had died. In applying this metaphor to the infant, these verses suggest that the baby lived for a short time in contrast with the stillbirth indicated in Poems 1 and 7. From a stylistic perspective, Méndez's choice to use antithesis with the contrast of seeing the sun and not seeing the moon is consistent with Méndez's use of antithesis in other poems.

The fifth couplet continues the poem's narrative arc by offering an explanation for the seedling-infant's death. The poetic voice blames the death on the guardian angel who fell asleep while on duty. Without the protection of his guardian angel, the seedling-infant is left unprotected in the dark of night. This darkness of the night contrasts with the bright and hopeful morning of the third stanza but also reflects the darkness of the tomb under the earth.

The final refrain clarifies the metaphor of the infant and the seedling. Méndez tells us that the seedling and the infant are one in the same by mixing the image of the

seedling with that of a cradle. The poetic voice also reiterates her claim from the second verse that the seedling by adding the possessive "mi" to the previous phrase "arbolillo nuevo" (11). The "triste cuna" from the last verse is not the seedling-infant's current resting place, the earth, as indicated by the preterit form of the verb *tener*. Instead it refers to the mother, specifically the mother's womb. This melancholy cradle expresses the mother's grief in response to the death and burial of her first born son.

Poem 7, "Niño perdido," marks the end of the first portion of the collection which directly addresses and speaks about the child. The symbolism in the first part of the poem as well as the embodiment and relational aspects of the poem are discussed in section X, and this analysis will focus on the second part of the poem. Continuing the theme of acceptance of the death from Poems 5 and 6, "Niño perdido" reflects a shift in Méndez's grief process from the searching mode of Bowlby's second stage of mourning to recognition of the fruitlessness of the search and acknowledgement of the child's death. At the same time that she accepts his death, Méndez also expresses deep yearning to both touch and see the child and for her own personal memory of him.

After beginning with a loving search through her dreams for the lost child, the second half of "Niño perdido" reflects Méndez's acknowledgement of the reality of her son's death with statements about her inability to touch and see him.

> Esta mano mía
> …….
> que alcanzar no puede
> ni sentir tu carne
> de niño nacido
> con pena y sin aire
> con alas de ausencia
> hecho niño-ángel. (10, 16-21)

The reader senses the poetic voice's grief in the fatalism and resignation of these verses. The poetic voice recognizes that her normal longing to reach or feel the baby are thwarted forever. Her efforts, yearning, and love simply are not sufficient because they can not change the reality that he was stillborn: "niño nacido / con pena y sin aire" (18-19). In verses 20 and 21, Méndez emphasizes this reality by representing the poetic voice's experience of the death as absence and loss as symbolized in child's wings of "ausencia" (20). Then in verse 21, she reiterates the truth of his death by envisioning him transformed into a child angel.

While the final stanza continues the message of acceptance of his death, Méndez shifts the focus of the poetic voice's longing from touch to visual memory. The poetic voice can't clearly envision him as an angel because she never saw him:

> Ni vi tu cabello
> rubio, ni vi tu semblante,
> pero me dijeron… y he de recordarte
> como aquella estampa…
> cuando me dejaste. (22-26).

This focus on the child's image is not unusual. Bowlby points out that the mother often will have "preoccupations with the image of the dead baby and dreams about him" (122). Besides her longing, the poetic voice regrets that the image she has of him is borrowed from others. It is not her own memory, but an "estampa," a representation of his image, given to her by others. The desire for her own memory of him is a powerful motivation for her search for the lost child earlier in the poem. Underneath her longings and regrets, there is also a layer of resentment and anger that the child abandoned her and she was left with just a borrowed impression of him.

Memories in the Depth of Grief: Poems 8 and 9

Memory can both console and torment the bereaved. Remembering the deceased can provide solace to loved ones and relieve the feelings of grief. Knapp finds parents who lose a child treasure their memories of the child and they fear losing what few memories they have (30). However, memories of the deceased and of his death can be also very painful, and those grieving may distract themselves from remembering and even express the need to forget for a time. Bowlby acknowledges that during the mourning process it is normal sometimes to distract oneself from painful memories and to even reject them for a time (139-140). Murphy, Shevlin, and Elklit explain "Bereavement and PTSD have some similar symptoms such as heightened levels of anxiety, avoidance, and reexperiencing" (58). They find that following the trauma of losing a child to perinatal or postnatal death a significant percentage of parents, especially mothers, experience anxiety, depression, interpersonal sensitivity such as loneliness and isolation, dissociation, somatic symptoms, and aggression (60, 65-66). Dissociative experiences in particular are a means to help the bereaved "avoid painful memories of the trauma" (66). Poems 8 and 9 demonstrate these opposing responses to memory. Poem 8 expresses the desire to forget and avoid the pain of remembering while Poem 9 embraces the spectrum of memories as part of grief.

In Poem 8, which has already been discussed from the perspective of embodiment, Méndez articulates the desire to reject the painful memory of her child's birth. Méndez constructs this short poem with six octasyllabic verses that compose one complete thought but are separated with enjambment. The structure and enjambment of the verses hold the reader in suspense to the very last line.

Que no venga, no, no venga
a mi recuerdo aquel día…
que aquel recuerdo me deja,
cuando me viene, una herida,
y ya no me queda sitio
donde poder recibirla. (1-5)

The repetition of "no" and the phrase "no venga" in the first verse expresses the mother's desperation as she pleads to forget (1). The following verses gradually explain the reason for her plea allowing the reader's understanding to unfold. The memory of the "aquel día" was traumatic for the mother, and she was left wounded emotionally by the experiences and the memory of the day of her child's birth and death.

Traumatic memories are particularly emotionally damaging because they can replay frequently in the victim's mind and can be triggered unexpectedly. The victim will often revisit the experience in order to find ways the traumatic event could have been prevented. This constant ruminating on the event can make it difficult for the victim to rest or recover emotionally. Thus, Méndez's depicts the recollection of that day as a guest who is not only uninvited and unwanted but who also injures the host and creates such destruction that there is no room to entertain him. While the memory is a guest, the poet's psyche is the space that is too damaged to receive him. The last image of the poem is of the mother who is so injured, she has no place left to be wounded. In Poem 8, Méndez movingly communicates the depth of the mother's grief and trauma and the pain suffered from reliving the traumatic death of her child through memory.

In contrast, Méndez accepts the memories, both good and bad, while detailing the overwhelming effects of her grief in Poem 9. In the first stanza, the poetic voice describes the consequences for her reasoning and well-being:

Si turbia la razón y roto el sueño
paso a ser una sombra entre mortales,

quede de mí la luz que ahora me guía
antes de ser mi sombra larga noche. (1-4)

She complains that her reasoning is impaired and that she suffers from insomnia which is very common somatic symptom for bereaved mothers (Murphy 66). Of course, both the lack of sleep and anxiety have an impact on her cognitive ability. The poetic voice is concerned about her emotional and mental state and fears she might become a shadow, "una sombra entre mortales" (2). The metaphor of the shadow here symbolizes a shadow of a person, someone not fully alive, and someone suffering from depression. For Méndez, being a shadow is a precursor to the "noche larga," or death. Through the metaphors of shadow and the long night, Méndez expresses an awareness of her mortality and her own precarious emotional state. To prevent succumbing, Méndez pleads that the light guiding her remain. She contrasts the guiding light with the shadow and the long night.

In the second stanza, Méndez provides a contrast to the fears expressed in the first stanza by acknowledging both positive and negative memories from pregnancy:

Quede de mí la angustia y el anhelo
y la risa y el llanto en esa espera.
Que algunos ojos para verme un día
se asomarán al mar donde me muevo. (1-8)

Instead of rejecting these memories, the poetic voice pleads that the mixed experiences and emotions of her pregnancy endure in the hope that she will be seen by "algunos ojos," possibly the child's. The contrasting emotions—anxiety and longing, and laughter and tears—represent related emotional reactions. *Angustia* is fear and distress over something that has happened or has yet to happen while *anhelo* is the longing for something that one does not possess. These are excellent descriptions of the opposing emotions that are experienced in pregnancy.

Meditations on Death: Poems 10 and 12

Méndez participates in the tradition of contemplative elegies in Poems 10 and 12 as she meditates on death. Both poems reflect on the inevitability of death and Méndez's uncertainty about what comes after death. In *The Modern Elegiac Temper* John Vickery studies the genre of the elegy from "the modern period" of the twenties and thirties (2). He refers to the topic of mortality as the "penumbral shadow of mortality that hangs over or surrounds the conventional elegy," and he observes that, in elegies, mortality is accompanied by sense of anxiety and doubt because there are no good answers for the loss of a loved-one to death (5-6). For Vickery, the poets of this period wrote elegies with "a reflective spirit largely devoid of final, or, often, even satisfactory answers" (2). Hence in Poems 10 and 12, Méndez reflects death's inevitability, the angst about it, and the absence of answers.

For the poetic voice in Poem 10, death is perplexing and illusive, but ever present. This poem presents both an unorthodox concept of death as well as the traditional view that death is unavoidable even if the moment is uncertain (*mors certa, hora incerta*):

> El miedo es amarillo,
> y la muerte ese cielo
> que todos nos confunde.
> Como una luz lejana
> que no queremos ver
> está al fín de nosotros,
> y la vamos siguiendo
> en el múltiple juego
> de las horas inciertas.
> Final, o estrella fija,
> y dintel de la nada.
>
> Yo sé que el frío es blanco
> y el miedo es amarillo. (1-13)

Méndez both opens and closes this poem on death with the synesthetic association of fear with the color yellow. Yellow here reflects the caution and anxiety of the speaker's fear of death. In the second verse, the color association is more subtly implied. While the reader might first associate "ese cielo" with a light blue sky, the metaphor "la muerte ese cielo" creates a correspondence between death and the sky, darkening the imagined color of the sky to that of the nighttime sky. Méndez continues to alternate between light and dark in the other images of the poem. The metaphor of death as "ese cielo" in the second verse also initially leads the reader to anticipate a more Christian concept of death in association to heaven, but Méndez puts that in doubt in the next verse "que todos nos confunde" (2-3). Certainly, death is confusing and difficult to understand for those left behind after a loved one dies.

Méndez then describes death as a distant light that we follow even while we try to ignore it during our lifetimes. In spite of this, death, like the light, remains in front of us until the moment we arrive at the moment of death. Méndez indicates the doubt and confusion mentioned earlier as she lists three possible final meanings for death—a final end, a star, and the "dintel de la nada." The poet does not have an answer to what is beyond the threshold of death, but she suggests three unknowns—the end of existence, a distant yet unmoving star, and the nihilism of nothingness.

To end Poem 10, Méndez leaves the darkness of nighttime and nothingness and returns to lighter colors in the final couplet. The poet relates the cold with the color white, echoing her suggestions of the coldness of fog and ice in Poems 24 and 28. Then she repeats the earlier association of fear with yellow. These images are in contrast with the darkness in the previous stanza. In addition, Méndez contrasts the uncertainty

expressed about the meaning of death with her statements of certainty about the colors of the cold and fear. Although death is inevitable, it is beyond human understanding while the experiences of being cold and afraid are knowable.

Poem 12 is a Platonic meditation on the mortal journey from the dark womb to the dark night of death. From one perspective, it is a reflection on the inevitability of death, the difficulty of finding one's way, and the futility of what others consider important.

> De lo oscuro venimos y vamos
> a otra noche pulsando caminos.
> Y la luz de la vida no sirve.
> Sólo voces y voces y voces.
> Y en el fondo, ese mar hondo y turbio
> y ese afán sin sentido de todos. (1-6)

The poetic voice imagines a dark landscape where light is useless and paths have to be forged by blindly groping. While the concept of the light of life is generally presented as positive, in this poem it is inadequate because it is ineffective at guiding the poetic voice along the paths. By removing the light, Méndez effectively reduces the prominence of sight in the poem while emphasizing the senses of touch and hearing in the following verses. The dark landscape contains a multitude of voices whose purpose is unclear, "Sólo voces y voces y voces" (4). In addition, there is the sound of a turbulent sea in the background (5). And the poetic voice perceives a senseless eagerness or ambition surrounding her (6).

In the second half of the poem, the imagery shifts from the sensory deprivation of darkness without life-giving light to a mirror clouded by living tears. In response to the darkness, the voices, the sea, and the futile desires of others, the poetic voice reveals that close by is a mirror with an image or essence that wishes to be seen.

Sin mirar que más cerca tenemos
un espejo que sueña, empañado
de ese vaho de las lágrimas vivas.
Y que acaso una mano pudiera
descubrir del cristal esa imagen;
esa imagen, o esencia, que clama
porque todos los ojos la vean. (7-13)

Because the mirror is dulled and clouded, the poetic voice wonders if perhaps someone could clear the mirror, wiping it with a hand, to see the image reflected there. For the poetic voice, it is not just an image; it is an essence that cries out to be seen by all. From a Platonic point of view, the image, the essence of the thing, is hidden from view by the darkness and the vapor of tears. Méndez's use of the subjunctive mood with *pudiera* and *vean* indicates her doubts that anyone would discover and see the image. Méndez presents the mortal journey from birth to death as dark and uncertain, but if we only knew that close by was a mirror which could show us the knowledge that it holds.

Another possible reading of Poem 12 finds connections between the mortal journey and the stillborn child. In this reading the child in pushing his way out of the womb comes from the dark womb and returns to darkness of death: "De lo oscuro venimos y vamos" (1). While the child never saw the light of day, as mentioned in Poem 1, he would have heard voices while in the womb: "Y la luz de la vida no sirve. / Sólo voces y voces y voces" (3-4). The deep and turbulent sea of the poem refers to the amniotic fluid in the womb: "Y en el fondo, ese mar hondo y turbio" (5). The "espejo que sueña" could represent the dead child himself (8). His image is difficult to see in the mirror in part because the mother's tears cover and obscure the reflection and because few recognize its presence. In addition, the poetic voice wishes that the hand of the mother might discover the image or essence of the child. The image cries out like a child at the moment of taking its first life-giving breath and wishes to be seen.

Disconnection: Poems 11 and 16

Several poems in *Niño y sombras* illustrate a sense of unreality or dissociation. These are defensive reactions to the intense experience of grief and loss. Murphy et al. point out that following perinatal death a significant number of bereaved parents experience dissociation which "can be seen as a coping mechanism for avoiding the painful memories of the trauma" (66). Eric Bui et al. explains that dissociation includes responses such as "alternations in the experience of time and place, a sense of detachment from oneself, and perceptual or memory distortions" ("Peri-loss Dissociation" 2). When dissociation is temporary, these responses can be part of a normal grief process although they can indicate a greater risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (Bui et al. 2). In Poems 11 and 16, Méndez displays two different types of dissociation, derealization and depersonalization. Derealization is the sense that one's environment or experiences aren't real or that one is in a dream, and depersonalization is the sense of feeling detached from one's self or an outside observer of events.

In Poem 11, Méndez includes elements of derealization by placing the poetic voice in an altered oneiric landscape surrounded by fog. In this one stanza poem, the poetic voice recounts wandering through a foggy dreamscape and encountering lights which urge her to remain there:

> Por paisajes de bruma y de anhelo
> a lo largo del sueño he vagado.
> Altas luces salieron a hablarme
> desde cielos remotos y helados.
> Una luz me decía: «¡No vayas! ...»
> Otra luz susurraba: «¡Despacio! ...»
> Otras y otras decían palabras
> que en el sueño quedaban temblando. (1-8)

The poetic voice describes the landscape of her dream as filled with fog and longing. The fog limits her vision and creates a sensation of isolation and vulnerability. The fog also contributes to a sense that these surroundings are not real. The "anhelo" or longing of the poetic voice is vague, but in this collection can be associated both with the yearning for the lost infant and for the future. The speaker's statement from the second verse that "he vagado" through this dream can be related to the searching impulse found in other poems of the collection. Both the speaker's "anhelo" and wandering indicate the yearning and searching characteristics of Bowlby's second phase of mourning.

Then in this dark and hazy dreamscape, numerous lights from far away emerge and speak to the poetic voice. In most of the collection, light is a positive element in general, but in Poem 11, the role of the lights is ambiguous because they seem to be asking the speaker to stay in the dream. The lights command the poetic voice to remain and caution her to go slowly. There are so many lights calling to her that the words remained reverberating in the dream, "quedaban temblando." These descriptions in Poem 11 suggest that Méndez experienced the dissociative response of derealization as part of her grief process and struggled at times with the impulse to remain in that dreamy state of unreality in order to avoid the tragedy and sorrow she had experienced with the death of her first child.

The Poem 16 also exhibits characteristics of dissociation, particularly depersonalization. In this one-stanza poem, the poetic voice expresses an inability to communicate with or relate to her addressee and a disconnection from reality, and this lack of connection is expressed through the senses of touch, hearing, and sight. Although the addressee is not clearly stated, it is my opinion that the poem is addressed

to Manuel Altolaguirre as are Poems 5 and 25. Martínez Trufero concurs with this reading for Poems 5 and 16 ("El duelo" 280, 291). Hence, the poem begins with the description of an unsuccessful encounter between the poetic voice and her addressee:

> Te toco y es una sombra
> lo que se enreda en mis manos,
> como si yo no estuviera
> formada para este mundo.
> Si te escucho, no te entiendo,
> como si no fuera este
> el lugar de mi existencia.
> Viéndote, no sé quien eres;
> temo soñar esta vida
> o que esta vida me sueñe. (1-10)

When the poetic voice touches the addressee, what should be a solid, tangible person or body, becomes a tangled shadow in her hands. The shadow is immaterial, intangible, and knotted, and it symbolizes the inability of the poetic voice to connect physically with the addressee through touch. Yet, she does not cast the blame on him, but on herself. She feels that she is not meant to be part of this world, and thus is separated from reality and those she loves. Not only can she not touch him, she is unable to understand his voice as if she were not physically present in this world. Furthermore, she can not identify him by sight. Consequently, in this poem, the poetic voice is unable to touch, understand or recognize her own husband. Méndez's images of observing her own interactions, the dysfunction of her senses, and not being able to communicate are excellent descriptions of depersonalization.

In addition, Méndez fears that she is living a dream, an indication of derealization: "temo soñar esta vida /o que esta vida me sueñe" (7-8). The poetic voice is distressed by her own sense of unreality, the feeling that she does not exist in the same world as her addressee, and her inability to connect and communicate with him.

These feelings and experiences also indicate that the poet feels she does not belong on this earth but in the beyond, in death with her son.

Someone's Moving: A Sense of Continued Presence in Poems 17 and 20

In the second half of the *Niño y sombras*, two poems contain references to a mysterious presence sensed by the poetic voice. Poems 17 and 20 both describe an unknown presence, but each have a different setting and ambiance and a different emotional response from the poetic voice. In the dark nighttime setting of Poem 17, the poetic voice responds with anxiety and insecurity at hearing footsteps from a mysterious, unseen ghost. In the daytime garden setting of Poem 20, the poetic voice calmly observes both the natural world surrounding her and her own sensory perception of a presence accompanying her. Both poems present this presence as both present and absent and are examples of what Bowlby calls a sense of the "continuing presence" of the deceased (96).

Paradoxically, this sense of presence can coexist with the acceptance of the loved one's death. According to Bowlby, a sense of presence commonly occurs during the second phase of mourning when the bereaved alternates between acceptance and disbelief, and yearning and searching (86). For Bowlby, the sense of the deceased's presence is a positive indication of a healthy mourning process because it indicates a "secure attachment" with the deceased which supports "the growth of self-reliance" (98). In addition, dreams of the loved one have similar qualities to a sense of the deceased's presence and often can be reassuring to the bereaved, although some dreams are distressing and do not provide comfort (Bowlby 97). In opposition to the Freudian ideal of mourning as detachment, Bowlby contends that for widows and widowers, "it is

precisely because they are willing for their feelings of attachment to the dead spouse to persist that their sense of identity is preserved and they become able to reorganize their lives along lines they find meaningful" (98). Kersting and Wagner also note that the mother's level of emotional investment and attachment as well as her level of physical experience and understanding about "the reality of the baby" have a big impact on the intensity of her grief (189). Moreover, Bowlby might observe that, as the pregnancy progresses, the mother's physical experiences and her increasing understanding of the baby as a real entity contribute to a growing attachment with the child still to be born. Bowlby would argue that, even in the case of perinatal death, a secure emotional attachment undergirds one's identity and provides a foundation for further personal development, and a continued sense of the deceased's presence is compatible with a healthy mourning process.

Poem 17 is an oneiric poem in which the poetic voice expresses a sense of an unknown presence with an accompanying sense of anxiety. In the first stanza, Méndez indicates she has heard someone walking in the night, and she finds herself without the light or assistance to discover who it is.

> Debajo de esta noche ¿quién camina?
> ¿Quién llevará ese hielo o esa llama?...
> Se ha empañado una luz ¡quien sabe en donde!
> Y el ángel de la fe de nada sirve. (1-4)

Because of the darkness of the night, the poet hears but is unable to identify the presence who is walking. Méndez emphasizes the inability to see or know who it is with the repetition of the question "¿quién?" She contrasts the darkness of the night and the light of the flame, the cold, hard ice and the hot, flickering flame, and between a distant light and the loss of its glow. In the fourth verse she juxtaposes what should be

a powerful, protective force "el ángel de la fe" with uselessness. Possibly, this is the Archangel Michael who is seen as protector of the faith, a healer of the sick, and the angel tasked with escorting the faithful to heaven. The speaker feels unprotected by this angel, and questions her own value as well as the usefulness of faith. The darkness, the lack of light, and the worthlessness of the angel of faith all contribute to a sense of hopelessness and anxiety in the face of the unknown.

In the second stanza, the poetic voice communicates her emotional state of anxiety and grief. In this stanza, Méndez plays with images that are missing something crucial yet unexpected: a heart without wings, a blind figure of sorrow without mirrors, and a blindfolded, flying child without direction.

> Se inquieta el corazón – no tiene alas –
> ni el dolor tiene espejos; solamente
> un pedestal que quiere sostenerle,
> con los ojos vendados como el niño
> de ese volar sin rumbo. (5-9)

The references to an uneasy heart and a blindfolded sorrow upon a pedestal create a sense of the poetic voice's vulnerability. Because the anxious heart has no wings, it is trapped and can not fly away from the possible threat in the previous stanza, just as the speaker can not flee. Without mirrors and with his eyes covered, sorrow is unable to see his own reflection or those around him. Not only can sorrow not see its reflection, his eyes are blindfolded, for like justice, sorrow is impartial. The lack of mirrors suggests that the poetic voice feels alone in her experience of grief because she does not see her pain reflected in those around her. Therefore, she feels all the more isolated and helpless. The last image of the stanza is of a blindfolded child who has been flying aimlessly. This child represents the stillborn and sightless baby whose death left him wandering without direction.

In the final stanza of the poem, the poetic voice again is aware of the mysterious presence. In this dark and silent night, the poetic voice hears of the sound of someone walking:

> Debajo de esta noche, yo lo escucho,
> – la noche es el silencio que no quema –
> un fantasma camina ¿quién lo mueve?
> Siento en mi sangre girar el Universo. (10-13)

The verb *quemar* links the last stanza with the images of ice and flame in the first stanza. While both ice and flame can burn the skin, neither the night nor silence burn. Instead, the deep silence of the night intensifies the sound of the unknown presence. The poetic voice identifies the presence as "un fantasma," the only use of this word in *Niño y sombras*. The question about who is causing the ghost to move indicates that the poet feels that there is some hidden force causing his movements. The poem ends with the poetic voice's sense of connection with the universe through her blood: "Siento en mi sangre girar el Universo" (13). This experience of continued presence is not comforting and indicates the unsettled state of mind present during the second stage of mourning as described by Bowlby (86-87). In Poem 17, Méndez depicts a troubling dream which unveils the poet's anxiety about the unknown, her feelings of being abandoned and isolated in her grief, and her contemplation of the forces at work in the universe.

The continued presence of Poem 20 does not elicit the same anxiety as in Poem 17. Poem 20 lyrically describes the memory of a quiet, sleepy moment in the afternoon rather than the dark of night. The poet establishes a peaceful garden ambiance with roses, silence, a blue sky, and a dove. In this ambiance, the poet remembers hearing

footsteps and feeling someone's breath, but once again she did not see anyone. She felt a presence in the absence of any physical being.

In the first stanza, Méndez begins the retelling of her experience with an unknown presence by establishing the background. She establishes a beautiful, calm ambience with synesthetic images full of sensory information: "un silencio de rosas," "el ámbito azul de la tarde," and "la paloma del sueño."

> Un silencio de rosas temblaba
> en el ámbito azul de la tarde.
> La paloma del sueño giraba
> dando blancas estelas al aire. (1-4)

The roses indicate the time of year to be late spring, and their trembling brings to mind a quiet breeze moving through the garden. The silent, fluttering roses are set against a backdrop of a blue expanse of sky where "la paloma del sueño" flew in mesmerizing circles. This sensorial natural environment provides a backdrop for encounter with the supernatural presence in the following verses.

In the second stanza, the poetic voice's attention to the natural world was diverted by sensory indications that someone was in the garden with her:

> Por la senda crujieron pisadas.
> Se sentía un aliento suave.
> Yo pensaba: «Alguien viene conmigo»
> Y mis ojos no vieron a nadie. (5-8)

The poetic voice sensed the presence of an unknown presence from the sound of footsteps on the path and the feeling of a soft breath. In contrast with Poem 17, the poet does not project any anxiety in her recollection. Instead, she quietly observed her environment with her senses. The presence was heard and felt, but it could not be confirmed by sight. In spite of the absence of visual evidence, she was certain that someone was accompanying her in the garden. Because of the beautiful atmosphere

and the poet's calm and sure perception of a presence, Poem 20 more closely describes the type of continued presence that comforts the bereaved during their early stages of grieving as Bowlby discusses it.

Broader Concerns for the World: Poems 13 and 24

In eight or more poems of *Niño y sombras,* Méndez expresses a broader concern for the world, referring directly to humanity, the world, the earth, and the universe. This theme corresponds with the contemplative strain of elegy, and in these poems we hear a "murmur of maternal lamentation" for humanity (T. S. Eliot *Wasteland* as quoted in Ramazani 21). Vickery notes that among many poets the world events that occurred during Méndez's youth and early adulthood, "generated responses that broadened and diffused the function of the elegy. As a result, greater prominence was given … [to] all the forms of personal, intellectual, and cultural loss suffered by mankind" (2). In addition, Knapp theorizes that one response to grief is to experience a shift in values towards greater understanding and compassion for others. In the second portion of the collection, Méndez repeatedly demonstrates this shift most clearly in poems when she expresses concern for the world and humanity and recognizes the pain and grief carried by others.

Considering that *Niño y sombras* was written in the spring of 1933 when Europe was on the verge of major political upheaval, violence, and war, Méndez reflects her uneasiness and anxiety about the future of humanity in the second part of the collection. As evidenced by Carlos Morla Lynch's memoires, Méndez, Altolaguirre, and their circle of writers and intellectuals discussed current events including scientific advancements and new devastating technology (Morla Lynch 195). Martínez Trufero

interprets some of Méndez's angst as reflective of Spain's "turbulenta, violenta e insegura realidad social y política" and the disillusionment experienced by intellectuals as the Second Republic struggled to live up to its promise ("El duelo" 297). While I agree with Martínez Trufero that Méndez was troubled by the situation in Spain, she specifically names the earth, the world, and humanity as the focus of her concern.

In these poems, Méndez has examined her personal pain and identified similar pain in the world. As Martínez Trufero comments, Méndez expresses "la desoladora visión del mundo y de su vida, reflejo de la frustración y desengaño ante la imposibilidad ya de albergar esperanza de cambio positivo en los seres humanos" (298). Martínez Trufero agrees that Méndez's overwhelming sadness expands until "lo universaliza, proyectándolo al mundo entero" (297).

The best examples of this change in values are in two groups of poems—Poems 13-15, and Poems 25-28. Because the theme of broader concern in certain poems has already been mentioned in previous sections and chapters, I will provide a brief overview before continuing with a deeper analysis of Poems 13 and 24. Poem 14 "Deseo" discussed in Chapter III is an excellent example of how Méndez's desire to guide and nurture her lost son broadens to encompass a maternal desire to nurture humanity. In Poem 14, the poetic voice expresses the desire to extend her helping hand to Humanity, personified as a lost little girl, and guide her by the hand: "¡Que mi mano fuese grande / … / y la Humanidad una niña, / tan perdida como está" (1, 4-5). Then in Poem 15 "Noche," Méndez ends the poem with the question: "¿Adónde va la angustia / que hoy invade la Tierra?" (13-14). In these verses, the poetic voice recognizes that suffering doesn't just affect her but is spreading over the whole Earth. From the second

grouping of poems that reflect a broader concern, in Poem 26 "Yo sé," the poetic voice protests the lack of concern for a world that is falling apart: "como a nadie le importa / que el mundo se deshaga" (3-4). In "Yo sé," the speaker also mentions current social ills including hunger and drought "hambre que este hombre / mastica junto al polvo" (24-25). As mentioned in section X, in Poem 27, the poetic voice describes the world as hopelessly sad: "el mundo sigue triste sin remedio" (4). In the final poem of the collection, Poem 28, the poetic voice questions why the world is this condition and why no one can do anything about it (4-5).

In the tradition of contemplative elegies, Méndez shifts in Poem 13 from her personal sorrow to a reflection on the anguish experienced both in the present and in the past. Unusual in comparison with other poems of *Niño y sombras* in which there is maternal poetic voice, Poem 13 introduces a speaker that could be interpreted as Spain personified. In the first stanza, the poetic voice reflects on the anguish, darkness, and uncertainty around her by asking the night three questions.

> ¿Qué angustia, noche, en torno a mis orillas?
> ¿Dónde fué el alba que floreció en mis manos?
> ¿Es tierra, o fuego lo que mis plantas tocan? (1-3)

In the first verse, the speaker asks the night about the distress she senses swirling around her "orillas"—the edges of her consciousness or the boundaries of the country. Then, Méndez contrasts the dark of night with the light of the dawn. In asking night where the dawn has gone, the poetic voice brings to mind all of the positive elements associated with the transition from night to day: light, life, fertility, happiness, and joy. Méndez's use of *florecer* implies a stronger connection to fertility and the beauty of flora as well as presenting a strong image of the dawn's rays blooming along the edges of the horizon. In addressing this question to the night, the poetic voice alludes to an

absence of light, life, fertility, and joy. The final question to the night contrasts different possibilities for the poetic voice: her feet standing on soil implies fertility and possible prosperity, but her feet standing on fire would cause injury and pain from the burning of the fire. This contrast highlights the speaker's state of uncertainty and makes the possibility of anguish more real by placing her directly upon a source of pain.

In the second stanza of Poem 13, Méndez focuses on the unfamiliar state of the world and the weight of injustice throughout history.

> Ni mi niñez ha sido de este mundo,
> ni en esta juventud me reconozco.
> Me pesan siglos de abrasadas sangres,
> de injustas vidas, de latidos huecos;
> me pesan sombras, que no pueden irse,
> voces me llaman de distintos cielos. (4-9)

The poetic voice recognizes she is living in a world very different from the one in which she spent her childhood or adolescence. This perspective could be interpreted as that of an individual observer or Spain given that the technological advances alone had created a very different world both on the individual and national levels. In the final four verses of Poem 13, Méndez adds the weight of injustice to the anguish, darkness, and uncertainty of the first stanza. The speaker proclaims that she is burdened by the centuries of mistreatment that people have suffered. In my opinion, the "abrasadas sangres" refer to those who were burned to death at the stake, a reference to the Inquisition and dangers that Jewish people faced in Spain. Méndez is referencing not only the persecution of Jews in Spain but also the mounting persecution of Jews in Germany which was present even in 1933. The "injustas vidas" refer to those who had suffered injustice, and the "latidos huecos" refers to the beatings of the hearts that can be heard across the centuries. To close the poem, Méndez echoes previous themes and

declares that the poetic voice is burdened by shadows and voices calling to her. The burdensome shadows are trapped for some reason, and the voices call to the speaker from distant skies or heavens. If the speaker is interpreted to be a person, the shadows seem to correspond with the shadowy sorrows of the other earlier poems. If the speaker is Spain, the shadows are the encroaching current problems and difficulties that appear to have no solution. The voices correspond to those who have been or are being mistreated, and "cielos" refers to both the heavens in a religious context and to the skies as seen from other locations. And so, Méndez expands the concern from her own shores to people from distant lands and from other cultural and religious contexts. Therefore, the grief expressed in Poem 13 reflects not just Méndez's personal sorrow but encompasses the anguish of darkness, physical pain, a cultural dark age, centuries of injustice and mistreatment, and a sense that the shadows and sorrow are encroaching.

In Poem 24, Méndez expresses concern about the cold and hostile cultural atmosphere of her time. She conveys her unease about how this impacts both herself and all of humanity. The poetic voice addresses humanity using *vosotros* and the epithet *seres de la tierra*, and she laments their current condition and lost potential. The poetic voice opens the poem with questions for humanity that articulate her worries about what she can offer humanity and about how they will affect her.

> ¿Qué atmósfera de niebla
> tendré para vosotros
> cuando me siento sombra
> sólo con acercarme?
> ¿Qué atmósfera de hielo
> encuentro que os envuelve
> oh seres de la tierra? (1-7)

In these verses, Méndez uses the metaphors of "niebla," "sombras," and "hielo" to communicate the vulnerable condition of the poetic voice and the precarious situation of

humanity. Fog appears in various forms throughout *Niño y sombras*, as "niebla" in Poems 19 and 24, "bruma" in Poem 11, and "vaho" in Poem 12. In these references, fog limits the speaker's vision and obscures the surrounding environment. It creates a feeling of isolation and being lost in an eerie and unfamiliar landscape. Prior to Poem 24, the poetic voice already felt isolated and vulnerable from her own emotional fog of grief. Consequently, the poetic voice anticipates that she will be able to offer only a dark and hazy emotional and artistic response to others, an "atmósfera de niebla" (1).

In addition, she feels like a shadow, impacted by the gloom and coldness she senses when she approaches the other people of the earth. Méndez refers to shadows in eleven poems of *Niño y sombras*, and these shadows represent a variety of concepts including the projected image of the person, the absence of light, an intangible and incorporeal image, an element of the person's whole self, the soul, and even death. The shadows in her poems often also convey a sense of sadness or depression. In Poem 24, when she comes close to the others, the poetic voice recognizes her vulnerability to slipping into this darkness of the shadows. In the following verses, Méndez clarifies the cause for her sense of being a shadow.

The "atmósfera de hielo" surrounding the other beings of the earth represents the cold and hostile atmosphere of her time. Therefore, the poetic voice wonders at this coldness: "¿Qué atmosfera de hielo / encuentro que os envuelve / oh seres de la tierra?" (5-7). This frozen atmosphere that surrounds and envelopes all the beings on earth is similar to the ice in Poem 28 that covers all human expression: "hay un hielo que cubre todo gesto" (9). The coldness drains her of light and the fullness of her personhood and her happiness. Thus, with the metaphor of ice Méndez laments the cold-heartedness

and the indifference of humanity to the plight of individuals, and to the poetic voice. In addition, through the metaphors of dark shadows and cold ice, Méndez helps the reader to feel the dark and cold state of her depression and grief.

In the second and third stanzas, Méndez contrasts the cold with the warmth of a hoped-for flame and dreamed-about heartbeats. The poetic voice finds herself unable to reach past the coldness to humanity without the light and warmth of a flame.

> Porque el frio es el límite
> no me acerco del todo,
> y no prende la llama
> que mi anhelo quisiera. (8-11)

The coldness is a boundary she cannot cross without risk to herself, and she regrets not being able to approach the other people. The flame that she longs for to provide light and heat does not ignite. The flame would be able to spread warmth and combat the coldness.

In the last stanza, Méndez laments that her dream for humanity is unviable because of the coldness that encircles it. Again she provides a contrast between the coldness of the current atmosphere with humanity's hidden potential for warmth.

> Y es una estrella helada
> la que el sueño me guía,
> ese sueño de pulsos
> que lleváis en vosotros
> ¡oh seres de la tierra! (12-16)

Méndez contrasts the coldness of the frozen star with the warmth of the heartbeats. Although the star should provide warmth and light, this star is frozen. The heartbeats aren't felt or recognized by "vosotros," but through her dream, the poetic voice knows that they are still present in humanity. Méndez's hope is for a sense of shared

humanity, a recognition of their embodied humanity, represented by the heartbeats in all of the beings of earth.

Living with Grief: Poems 18, 23, 25, 27 and 28

As the collection progresses, Méndez demonstrates a gradual transition in her mourning process from the earlier acute sorrow to living with her grief. In Poems 18, 23, 25, 27 and 28, Méndez expresses greater acceptance of her loss and reveal moments of transition between Bowlby's third and fourth phases, from disorganization and despair to a redefinition of the self and her circumstances. Poem 18 reveals a potential for hope and future happiness. Poem 23 represents the poetic voice's resilience and reveals a redefinition of the self in connection with life. In Poem 25, Méndez articulates a renewed connection with her beloved and resistance to the temptations to flee or lose herself in illusion. Méndez depicts in Poem 27 the mother's sensitivity to her internal sorrow as well as the sadness of the outside world as she takes tentative steps into the street and back into the refuge of the home. Finally, in the contemplative elegy of Poem 28, Méndez communicates acceptance of her son's but also expresses the continuation of her grief and despair indicating that she has not yet fully shifed into Bowlby's fourth phase of reogranization.

In Poem 18, "Canciones," in spite of the grief, shadows, and numbing coldness, Méndez discovers a small trace of hope and happiness.

> Sombra. Hielo.
> El acá, puente de dudas.
> El más allá, sin remedio.
> Una gota de alegría
> se me ha quedado en los dedos.
> Quiero una guitarra nueva,
> un violín para mi sueño

y una risa que no sepa
amarga como veneno. (1-9)

The poem opens with "Sombra. Hielo," two prominent negative images which have been repeated throughout the collection (1). The darkness and intangibility of the shadow and the coldness and hardness of the ice have come to symbolize Méndez's grief. After the death of her son and subsequent depression, Méndez is a shadow of her former self, and she reflects this through the shadows in the poems. The ice is an indication of the poetic voice's emotional state, and the intermittent dissociation and the numbness that often occur during the early stages of grief and may return sporadically as a psychotically protective measure. The following two verses contrast the uncertainty of life here on earth with the inevitability of the hereafter. Her life on earth in the here and now is full of doubts and questions, "puente de dudas," and whatever is to be found in the afterlife, the beyond is unavoidable, "sin remedio." Death itself is inevitable and unavoidable.

In "Canciones," Méndez expresses a limited amount of hope for happiness which is rare in this collection. In spite of her doubts and her son's death, she discovers: "Una gota de alegría / se me ha quedado en los dedos." This drop is a reminder of her happiness in the past, and the potential for happiness in the future. The poetic voice shifts from the shadows and coldness of the first part of the poem to desires for music and laughter because they bring her happiness and hope. While in the depths of her grief the mother has been missing elements represented by the musical instruments—new possibilities, "una guitarra nueva," and peaceful sleep, "un violin para mi sueño" (7-6). The poetic voice also hopes for happiness not tainted by bitterness and the poison of grief. The "gota de alegría" as well as the instruments and

laughter indicate the early signs of a transition in Méndez's grief process as she moves from the despair of the third stage to sensing a possibility for happiness and for a changed purpose in life which comes in Bowlby's fourth stage of mourning.

While Poem 18 reveals traces of hope for her future, Poem 23 is a declaration of determination and resilience in the face of adversity. The untitled poem of one stanza consists of twelve verses varying between 8 and 14 syllables with assonant rhyme in the even verses. In this poem, the poetic voice counters the false impression of her addressees—her social circle, her acquaintances, the readers, the world—that she is coping well with her grief. Underneath her façade, the poetic voice tells us she is struggling; however, she aligns her self-concept with life and the eternal existence of the *yo*. Poem 23 indicates a redefinition of her identity and a refocusing of her life.

Previously in Poem 22, "Noche," Méndez had described the death of the child as an invasion of her body by death which she fought against positioning herself on the side of life "y yo, campo en batalla / … / aposté por la vida" (10, 11). This provides context for the first four verses of Poem 23 in which the poetic voice declares that she is only able to stand with the help of invisible powers on either side of her:

> Fuerzas ocultas me sostienen,
> un apoyo invisible en cada brazo.
> No creáis que estas fuerzas
> son para mí un descanso. (1-4)

In these verses, the poetic voice reveals her vulnerability and her need for support, and she counters the impression that she is coping well with her grief. By directing her verses to *vosotros* with the command "No creáis," the poetic voice challenges their expectations of a quick recovery. These outside observers do not see her internal struggle described in the next section of the poem.

In the following five verses, the poetic voice provides a new definition of her self-concept, aligning herself with life. Méndez's three redefinitions of her identity are fiercely determined in comparison to her vulnerability and frailty in the beginning of the poem.

> Yo soy la vida en lucha
> de cada hora y de cada paso.
> Yo soy la fuerza de mi misma,
> la antena receptora del milagro.
> Yo soy la vida sin remedio. (5-9)

In each metaphor about her identity, the poetic voice reiterates her connection to life. First, when she envisions herself as life battling each moment and each step of the way, the poetic voice embodies both the force of life and the struggle to move forward. Second, she identifies herself with her own strength which allowed her to receive the miracle of life. Finally, the poetic voice presents herself a paradoxical metaphor of "la vida sin remedio" (9) ironically implying that she is alive whether she wants that or not. Bowlby describes the transition from the "phase of disorganization and despair" to the "phase of reorganization" as a period of time in which the bereaved fluctuates between depression and examining his changed circumstances and considering how to adjust which "entails a redefinition of himself as well as of his situation" (94). Méndez seems to be crossing at least temporarily into Bowlby's fourth phase of mourning as she redefines herself. These three metaphors represent the poetic voice's move to a redefinition of her self-concept that accepts the struggle of being alive despite the death of her son.

In addition to identifying herself with life and redefining herself, Méndez continues along this trajectory articulating a belief in the transcendence and permanence of the self or the soul. This statement of belief does not necessarily conform to

traditional Christian beliefs because Méndez leaves the location and length of time open and unknowable.

> Mi muerte no será sino un colapso;
> porque después de muerta seguiré viviendo,
> nadie sabe hasta donde ni hasta cuando. (10-12)

She describes death as a collapse, as the moment when the forces sustaining her let her go and fall. Instead of viewing this as a tragedy, she views life as ongoing after death, even if it is uncertain and without clear or traditional parameters. Death will not bring defeat nor an end to the self, for her *yo* will transcend death.

As the poems of *Niño y sombras* progress, the poetic voice becomes very isolated and lonely in her grief, and Poem 25 reflects a positive change in Méndez's interpersonal relationships towards greater connection. The poetic voice confronts her desire to flee and isolate herself. This desire stems from her profound sorrow, but also from a fear of her own self and her fear of being deeply known by her beloved. Thus, the speaker alternates between the desire to run away and recreate herself and the realization that she can no longer deceive or isolate herself. She credits this shift to her addressee, her beloved. Although the addressee is not clearly named, it is reasonable to assume that the *tú* of the poem is Manuel Altolaguirre. Poem 25 thematically contrasts with the two previous poems that are probably addressed to Altolaguirre, Poem 5 and Poem 16. In Poem 5, the poetic voice expresses frustration that he does not understand the depth of her grief and the wish to leave this life. In Poem 16, the speaker feels detached from life and her beloved, and in spite of her efforts, she is unable to connect with him. In Poem 25, the poetic voice is able to reconnect with her beloved, and ultimately this reconnection allows her to disrupt her tendency to hide in fantasy, step back into the light and recover a part of her identity.

Poem 25 consists of four stanzas and 17 verses. In the first stanza, Méndez establishes the basic elements of the poem: the dynamic with her beloved, her fear of facing herself, and her resulting impulse to flee and hide.

> Al asomarme a tí, porque me veo
> quisiera huir a donde no me alcances,
> donde el desconocerme me permita
> soñarme como quiero. (1-4)

In allowing her beloved to see her, the speaker opens herself up emotionally, but also she is better able to see herself. As a result, she wants to run away from her beloved, but really she is hiding from herself. Her wish to be unknown and be able to dream up a different identity echo Méndez's proclivity for traveling and recreating herself. In spite of her desire to connect with her beloved, the poetic voice fears being known and knowing herself.

In the second stanza, the speaker finds she can no longer hide from herself. The beloved is the catalyst for this change.

> Tu yo frente a mi yo, me es imposible
> aislarme de mí misma
> y crearme de nuevo y recrearme
> ante espejos de engaño. (5-8)

In the presence of her beloved, she can no longer keep herself isolated, create a new self and amuse herself with deceptions. As noted before, the poetic voice's isolation is as much from her own self as from others. Méndez plays with the verbs *crearse* and *recrearse* emphasizing the repetition of reinventing the self for one's own amusement and deception. In addition, the author plays with the idea of the mirror suggesting the shallowness of focusing only on how one sees oneself in the mirror and the deceptiveness of the image reflected. When face-to-face with her beloved, the poetic

voice sees herself as reflected in his eyes and is thus drawn out of her self-isolation and deception by his perception of her.

In the third stanza, the presence of the beloved again prevents her from fleeing or from creating an illusion. Thus, he prevents her self-deception.

> Tu presencia me priva de evadirme
> y ser la creadora del ensueño
> que ha tocado mi frente sin sentido
> rompiendo nudos, hilos y cadenas. (9-12)

This tendency to create her own illusory world has impacted her thinking, but her beloved connects her back to reality. He releases her from the bondage of illusion represented by knots, threads, and chains of the last verse of the stanza.

In the fourth stanza, the poetic voice credits her beloved for bringing her out of her shadows. He provides the clarity and light she needs to remain connected to life.

> No se puede vivir en una sombra
> cuando la luz nos une al otro lado.
> Mi claridad eres tú y huir quisiera
> hacia otra realidad, junto a ese sueño
> que persigue mi vida sin lograrlo. (13-17)

The speaker comments that it is impossible to live in a shadow when the light connects us with the other side, the side of life. Here *sombra* symbolizes death, depression, sadness. Her beloved is metaphorically represented as clarity, as light, as clearness of thought. Yet, in spite of her relief to be reconnect to her beloved and to life, the poetic voice is still drawn to the illusion of dreams and even possibly to death.

Independent of the context of personal grief constructed by the poems of *Niño y sombras*, Poem 27 could be interpreted as a response to a tumultuous, frightening, and depressing external environment. From Martínez Trufero's perspective, the turbulent political environment overlaps with Méndez's own sorrow, and although an

interpretation focused on the political and social environment is possible, the sadness in the Poem 27 is Méndez's own: "el sentimiento de tristeza que lo recorre es personal, íntimo, aunque proyectado al exterior" ("El duelo" 297-298). Mártinez Trufero asserts that Méndez "universaliza [su estado de ánimo], proyectándolo al mundo entero" (297). I concur with Mártinez Trufero that the sadness present in the exterior environment mentioned in Poem 27 intersects with Méndez's personal grief and is reflected by the poem, and I agree that Méndez sees connections between the tragedies of her time with her own. After all she worries about the anguish and hostility she sees in the world and about how humanity is like a lost child. However, Méndez is not projecting onto the world an unhappiness that doesn't exist, rather she reveals the intersections between her emotional state and the state of the world, and she moves in between them illuminating their connections for the reader.

In Poem 27, the poetic voice moves into the street and then back to the refuge of her home, and the attention of the poem shifts with her from a focus on the distressing state of the world back to a focus on her personal grief. Considering the context of loss of a child, the poem reflects both the internal sadness of the poetic voice and her anxious response to the unhappiness she sees in the world, and these would be indicative of Bowlby's third phase of mourning, in which the bereaved tentatively attempt to reestablish order in their lives and engage with their world yet often find themselves in despair.

In the first four verses, the Méndez describes the process of trying to engage the world by going out onto the street. Although there is no indication how long after birth Méndez wrote this particular poem, the physical postpartum recovery period lasts

traditionally forty days or six weeks and is known as the *cuarentena*. Even after a stillbirth, the mother would need time to recover and rest at home. Although getting out of the house is a good sign of physical healing, the poetic voice is still emotionally vulnerable:

> Salgo a la calle y voy en ascua viva,
> o voy temblando porque el mundo es triste.
> Y vuelvo de la calle y entro en casa
> y el mundo sigue triste sin remedio. (1-4)

When the poetic voice steps onto the street, she is overwhelmed by an acute state of anxiety: "voy en ascua viva, / o voy temblando" (1-2). The anxiety and despair of the poetic voice are in response to "el mundo…triste" that she observes outside of the refuge of her home. Because of her own sorrow, the speaker is intensely aware of the sadness of the world that surrounds her. And when she returns home, she finds that the state of the world does not change, its sadness is constant, "sin remedio" (4). Even her home can not fully protect her.

In the following six verses, the speaker rejects possible reasons for why she is anxious and sad. Overall, she disputes a lack of outward religious trappings or devotion and belief for her sadness.

> Y no es que falte un ángel en la estancia.
> que nos sonría, que nos hable al menos.
> Y no es que falte un dios para las cosas,
> ni ese deseo de pasar soñando
> sin escuchar las quejas que en el aire
> vagan por encontrar por fin el eco. (5-10)

In these verses, the poetic voice appears to be responding to suggestions or questions others have asked in an attempt to understand or relieve her pain. Her home is not without an image or figure of angel to protect and communicate with the household; nor are they lacking a god. Once more Méndez suggests that her religious beliefs are not

completely orthodox, by not capitalizing the word god. Therefore, she refutes the suggestions that she is sad because of a lack of religious devotion. And to those who would tell her to ignore the sounds of the world's sadness, she responds that she would love to dream it away. Nor can her home completely shield her from the world and the protests, complaints, and hurt. Her sadness is not the result of a lack of the outward trappings of religion or belief in a god, and although she would like to, she can not ignore others' pain. She hears their complaints because she too is sad and in pain. She too has reason to complain and cry for justice. This sadness overwhelms the normal elements that might provide intercession for the poetic voice, the angel and god, and have even overwhelmed her ability to ignore it.

Méndez closes *Niño y sombras* with Poem 28, a contemplative elegy reflecting on the loss of her son. It is the second longest poem of the collection, with twenty-seven verses, the majority of which are hendecasyllabic or Alexandrine (fourteen syllables) with several dodecasyllabic and heptasyllabic verses. While Poem 28 demonstrates the poetic voice's progression in grief to a greater acceptance of her child's death, it also expresses characteristics of Bowlby's third phase of mourning of "despair and disorganization" and indicates she has not yet fully moved into the "phase of reorganization."

In the beginning of the poem, Méndez establishes the contemplative theme of the poem by presenting five philosophical questions. These questions are consistent with the philosophical or reflective strain of elegy and provide a broad frame for the poem. On the other hand, these questions also function on a personal level, and it is quite normal for the bereaved to ask why a loved one has died and search for reasons or

solutions (Knapp 35). Interestingly, the poetic voice rejects the first three questions which focus on her own past, future, and destiny. Instead, she asks the crucial questions: "why?" and "why can't anybody do something?"

> No voy a preguntarme de donde vengo
> no adonde iré después de la tormenta
> ni que estrella es la mía en este tránsito;
> lo que sí me pregunto es porqué el mundo
> es lo que és y nadie puede nada[4]. (1-5)

These verses give a resigned tone to the poem, but the poetic voice is not complacent nor satisfied. Her refusal to ask about her past origins, where she might go in the future, and which star is hers all indicate an acceptance of the reality and the experience of the death of her son. Begoña Martínez Trufero interprets the storm and the star as references to the turmoil in the world and the poetic voice's sense of belonging and destiny, and this is certainly a valid interpretation ("El duelo" 299). But considering the later references to memory and her son's death in Poem 28, in my opinion, Méndez uses the metaphors of "la tormenta" to symbolize the trauma of her son's death and her "estrella…en este tránsito" to represent her son in the heavens (2-3). This interpretation gives deeper poignancy to her question: "porqué el mundo / es lo que és y nadie puede nada" (4-5). The poetic voice's question functions on two levels. On a personal level, her question asks why her child died and why no one could prevent that tragedy, but it also asks why is the world in tragic, painful turmoil and why no one can prevent it. These verses communicate the frustration, defeat, and questioning of the young mother.

[4] Several typesetting irregularities found in *Niño y sueños* are present in these four verses. In Spanish orthography today, "donde" in the first verse would carry an accent as would "qué" in the third verse, i.e. *dónde* and *qué*. In the fourth verse, "porqué" would now be written *por qué*, and "és" would be written without an accent. Unfortunately, a more recent printed edition of Poem 28 was not available. In particular, Poem 28 does not appear in the anthologies of Méndez's poetry consulted, including *Las dos orillas: Concha Méndez: Antología poética* (1976).

Méndez generalizes from her own pain to a broader sense of injustice in the following four verses. In order to provide an example of the injustice in the world, she presents a range of normal human actions and gestures that are frozen in place by ice.

> Cuando se grita, cuando se cae enfermo,
> cuando se sueña, cuando se va deprisa,
> cuando se intenta amar, cuando se odia,
> hay un hielo que cubre todo gesto. (6-9)

Méndez employs impersonal *se* for this list of human responses to life in order to provide distance for the speaker and reinforce that all people have similar experiences. The image of ice appears in three other poems of the collection. In Poem 16, Méndez contrasts ice with flame, but in Poem 18, she mentions it alongside shadow in the first verse. Then in Poem 24, Méndez makes a similar reference to ice covering humanity: "¿Qué atmósfera de hielo / encuentro que os envuelve / oh seres de la tierra?" (5-7). In Poems 24 and 28, the ice suggests the coldness, the hostility, and the indifference that she sees in human interactions. According to Méndez, the ice that immobilizes us and prevents us from responding to each other is part of the injustice in the world.

In contrast to the previous verses, the poetic voice boldly declares her own accomplishments. She lists a variety of difficult challenges she has faced and declares herself to be strong, adventuresome, and successful.

> Yo he llevado sonrisas de dos filos,
> y he saltado los mares y las treguas,
> y he aceptado combates y he vencido.
> Pero, ¿a quién he vencido mas[5] que al hielo? (10-13)

[5] In Méndez's original text "mas" does not carry an accent here. *Más que* followed by a noun signifies "more than" which is the most logical interpretation of this phrase here. Regrettably, clarification from a later version of the poem was not possible because Poem 28 does not appear in the consulted anthologies of Méndez's poetry.

With “sonrisas de dos filos,” Méndez plays with the shape of the mouth and the lips forming the two edges of the smile. In stating she has worn “sonrisas de dos filos,” the poetic voice is referring to her successful navigation of the pressures on women to conform to societal expectations and please others by wearing smiles that hide their true feelings. The poetic voice proclaims her success crossing natural and human boundaries of oceans and truces. Mártinez Trufero comments that Méndez has been able to “alcanzar horizontes impensables, superando los límites que la propia naturaleza le imponía, obviando muchas veces las mismas leyes” (“El duelo” 300). The poetic voice declares herself capable of fighting her own battles and winning, and she claims victory over the ice.

In the context of the collection, the ice represents human coldness and indifference and often goes hand-in-hand with the shadow of depression and sorrow. In spite of her claims of victory, by stating this in the form of a question, the poetic voice places doubt in the reader’s mind; has she really conquered the ice? The ice that has frozen human expression and communication is not easily conquered. At the beginning of Poem 28, the poetic voice implies that she does not know where she will go after the storm; she is unsure about her future after losing her son. The death of her child is Méndez’s own personal ice storm that proved to be extremely difficult to overcome.

The next three verses offer examples of how the ice impacts more than just the poetic voice or human interaction. In verse 14, Méndez presents four disparate natural elements as metaphors:

> Toro suelto, centella, nube, espiga
> ¿que más da? Hay un aire que embalsama los hechos,
> que embalsama las horas y la risa. (14-16)

These four metaphors are some of the most difficult to interpret in *Niño y sombras*. Martínez Trufero interprets them to be symbols of various aspects of Méndez's identity and moments in her life (300). According to Martínez Trufero, the loose bull symbolizes Méndez's boldness, rebellion, and need for freedom; the lightning represents her vitality and artistic productivity; the cloud signifies times of insecurity; and the sprig symbolizes her current state of being reduced to a meager, insignificant personality (300). While Mártinez Trufero's interpretation is well thought out and interesting, the bull and lightning are not consistent with Méndez's other self-descriptions, clouds and fog represent dream-states or feelings of isolation in other parts of the collection, and finally in *Niño y sombras* the only other allusion to anything like a sprig or a stalk occurs in Poem 6, "Canción," in which "arbolillo" can be read as a clear reference to the deceased child. In my opinion, Méndez presents these natural elements to communicate that the ice is indifferent to what it covers. The ice does not respect the strength and danger of the unconfined bull; the speed, light, and heat of the lightning; the distant formlessness of the clouds; or the fertility of the sprig of wheat. None of this makes a difference because a cold breeze preserves everything in ice, even time and laughter. The events, hours, and laughter are not only encased in this destructive, cold force, but they are also preserved in memory.

With this reference to memory, Méndez finally leads us to the heart of this storm and the ice. She leads us into her memories of that day with the hours of labor, the laughter of her friends as they waited with Altolaguirre, their expectations, and their fears.

> Mientras tanto, es el pulso lo que aquieta en la sombra,
> son los ojos que todos pasaremos mirando,

y el espejo de un día, y después el recuerdo…
¡Cuantas veces la muerte se asomó a nuestros labios!...
– Yo la vi, despacito, entrándose en la alcoba – (17-21)

Méndez begins tentatively with oblique references to the child's death: a quieting pulse hidden in the shadow of the womb, the eyes that everyone is waiting and watching for, the day's reflection, and the memory. Méndez's use of the first person plural of the verb "pasaremos" and the possessive pronoun "nuestros" tells the reader that she was not alone in her waiting, but who she includes in the group is unclear. It is easy to imagine that this includes Altolaguirre, those caring for her, and their friends, but in using the first person plural, Méndez also invites the reader to join her and the group. In addition, the ellipses at the end of verses 19 and 20 include the reader by encouraging a pause for the poetic voice to complete her recollection of that particular day. Then, the poetic voice confesses that she and those around her feared death and spoke of it. This is not a naïve mother; she saw death come into the room, little by little, and as she said earlier in the poem "y nadie puede nada" (5). And so the reader finally understands that the memory is of death, and the trauma of a difficult birth when the mother and infant were wavering between life and death.

Méndez closes the poem and *Niño y sombras* with a fatalistic reflection on the nature of life and the consequences of our experiences. During our lifetimes, what we see and experience changes us, and we accumulate the burdens of those experiences while time continues to flow.

Yo he visto y visto y visto cosas que me han dejado
sin sombra de lo que era;
porque las cosas pesan;
igual pesa un paisaje que dolor, que una duda.
Y las horas se llenan de pesos y de sombras,
y las horas nos llevan con el peso, callando… (22-27)

The poetic voice sounds tired and battered by what she has seen, and she feels incomplete, missing a part of herself. The repetition of "visto" implies that the experience of seeing negative things is unrelenting. The poetic voice is not the same woman because these unnamed experiences, "las cosas," have changed her and weighed down upon her (23-4). Méndez illustrates what these things might be—landscape, pain, doubt, shadows—emphasizing the uniformity of their weight. While "un paisaje" seems like a neutral place, "dolor" and "duda" are negative experiences and feelings. Thus, these burdens are the accumulation of neutral and negative experiences in life. Our time and our lives gradually fill and become heavy with dark and intangible shadows. As time moves on, it carries us with the burden of life, and gradually we become silent, just as the pulse of the baby was silenced by death.

Chapter V: The Maternal, Creative Subject

Introduction

Prior to her pregnancy and the death of her first child, Concha Méndez was a recognized poet with three poetry collections to her name, and she was one of a group of female poets who asserted themselves as creative subjects. In addition, she had the support of her husband Manuel Altolaguirre and uncommon means to publish her work. Even so, Spain in the 1930s was not the most welcoming environment for combining artistic creation with motherhood. We can not be completely certain how Méndez would have combined motherhood and her creative work in Spain because soon after Méndez and Altolaguirre returned to Spain with Paloma, their daughter who was born in London, the Spanish Civil War interrupted their creative output and their publishing partnership. Because of the war and the family's displacement, Méndez lost key catalysts of her creative life—her circle of artistic friends, the established publishing business, and eventually her marriage to Altolaguirre. In spite of these losses, Méndez continued writing throughout her life and published poetry and plays both in Cuba and in Mexico during her exile while she raised her daughter, sometimes as a single parent, and later while she participated in the daily life of her grandchildren. Even in difficult circumstances and at a time when the social expectation was antithetical to creative production, Méndez continued her work as a creative subject and demonstrated her investment in her identity as poet.

The question pertinent to this chapter is what do the poems of *Niño y sombras* tell us about the poet's perception of herself as a maternal creative subject after the loss of a child? How does the poet position her subjectivity in the poems, and how is it

related to her maternal identity and the crisis of loss? I argue in this chapter that Méndez continues to position herself as a maternal creative subject in *Niño y sombras* by continuing her relationship with the child from a creative standpoint through her poetry. The poem that is most indicative of Méndez's maternal poetic subjectivity is Poem 26, "Yo sé."

The idea of maternal subjectivity is thought by some to be paradoxical because the mother is not traditionally conceived of as a subject. As discussed in Chapter II, for much of Western cultural history the mother was too connected to her own body through pregnancy, birth, and lactation to be a thinking, speaking, writing subject. In addition, the Freudian and Lacanian traditions theorize that in order to gain subjectivity children must emotionally separate from their mother and the maternal body, and associate themselves with a father-figure who imparts language and culture to the children providing the means to become individualized subjects (Stone 118-121). In "Against Matricide: Rethinking Subjectivity and the Maternal Body," Alison Stone calls this separation from the mother and the maternal body as described in Julia Kristeva's writings "a 'matricidal' separation because it involves deep psychical violence" (118). Although from Kristeva's perspective, this psychological matricide is necessary in order for a child to be able to acquire language and become a speaking subject, Stone proposes a conception of the development of subjectivity in which the child becomes an individualized subject as a process of differentiation rather than separation or matricide (118-19, 135). Overall, if the mother is not seen as a transmitter of language and culture, she is not seen as a subject.

In order for the mother to be accepted as a subject, we must think of subjectivity as embodied and relational instead of coming from a disembodied and autonomous mind. In "Introduction: Maternity Between Body and Subjectivity" from her book *Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Maternal Subjectivity*, Stone explains the importance of understanding subjectivity in relationship with the maternal body: "If mothers are subjects, they can only be subjects of a new kind, who generate meanings and acquire agency from their place in maternal body relations…a specific form of subjectivity that is continuous with the maternal body" (3).

There are several aspects that characterize the traditional thinking around motherhood and subjectivity. They are the silence of the mother, the separation of subjectivity from the body, and an external focus of cultural production in general. In "Troublesome Practices: Mothering, Literature and Ethics," Emily Jeremiah points out that "[m]aternal muteness and marginality, most often the rule, have traditionally been seen as prerequisites for the survival of culture" (231). Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy in the "Introduction" to *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities* remind us that women writers have been limited by "binary logic, particularly the injunction to either mother or write," but writing mothers demonstrate "the value of *both* procreation *and* creation" (5). Daly and Reddy argue that "[t]o insist upon a dialogic (both/and) rather than a monologic (either/or) subject, these mother/writers must simultaneously disrupt narratives that silence mothers and invent a different notion of … subjectivity" (5). This reformulation of maternal subjectivity can be expressed in the fluid boundaries between genres in women's writing: "The hybrid forms of writing that women authors often produce are textual symptoms of the effort to reformulate the

subject (maternal or otherwise)" often combining genres with autobiography (Daly and Reddy 12). Writing that comes out of the woman's lived experience crosses the line betweeen the universal and the particular because it does not maintain the traditional boundaries that separate forms of narrative, drama, and poetry from the genres of history, biography, and autobiography. Autobiography specifically is both internally-focused and particular to the individual as opposed to the externally-focused and universal literary forms which traditionally have been valued in Western literary history. Thus, the combination of the poetic genre with autobiography, the particular, defies the aesthetic importance placed upon the external focus for inspiration and on the value of the universal.

In *Niño y sombras* and particularly in Poem 26, "Yo sé," Méndez defies these limitations of separation from the body, silence of the mother, and an external focus. Instead, Méndez combines the genres of poetry and autobiography and poetic creativity alongside the experience of motherhood. She disrupts the expectation of an external narrative by speaking out and writing of her relationship with her maternal body, her relationship with the child, and her grief over her loss. She is the new maternal subject that Stone defines since she creates meaning through her poetic expression and declares her agency based on a relationship with both her maternal body and her potential for creating new life. Méndez locates her poetic voice in relationship with the child and her own body in relationship with present, past, future, and in relationship with the self.

Analysis of Poem 26, "Yo sé"

In *Niño y sombras*, Poem 26, "Yo sé," is key to understanding Méndez's perspective on her subjectivity. The poem, consisting of fifty-four lines, does not have

any stanzas but can be divided thematically into 5 sections. Through the course of the poem, Méndez reveals an *ars poetica* that declares an internal focus for her poetics that draws on her personal strengths and a relationship with her maternal body. Méndez defies the indifference of everyone to define her poetic subjectivity in relationship to her maternal body and thus generate meaning distinct from her contemporaries.

"Yo sé," begins with the poet's declaration that she is aware of the apathy and indifference of others. She equates the external disdain for what she possesses with the general disregard towards the collapse of the world. Interestingly, after an emphasis throughout the collection on absence, lack, and loss, Méndez makes a declaration of possession at the beginning of this poem even while she acknowledges the disinterest about what she has:

> Yo sé que a nadie importa
> lo que tengo,
> como a nadie le importa
> que el mundo se deshaga.
> Una uña que vive, yo sé que
> a nadie importa,
> ni siquiera a la mano
> que de adorno la lleva. (1-8)

Although what she possesses is purposely opaque, as the poem progresses Méndez references the body, her personal poetic focus, the child produced from her own body, and her grief. These are all things that she believes that do not matter to anyone. When Méndez reiterates her criticism of apathy towards the state of the world and its potential destruction, she drops her dispassionate facade of the first two verses. Her concern for humanity and the world is palpable throughout *Niño y sombras*. The following metaphor of the "uña que vive" and hand symbolizes the poet who adds beauty to the world in which she lives. In this metaphor, Méndez describes the nail as a small,

decorative element of the larger and more functionally important hand that does not recognize the value of the nail. In spite of the importance of the nail to the hand—and the poet to the world—Méndez laments that no one values the nail or the poet's significance. In the beginning of Poem 26, Méndez establishes that she is willing to speak out and contest the values of those who disregard the worth of the individual and ignore the world's potential collapse.

In the following section of the poem, Méndez declares her disdain for and resistance to the apathy and nihilism that she encounters. She then provides the reader with a long list of topics primarily from the natural world, beginning with the sun and ending with hunger and dust:

> Pero, aunque sé, y me sobra,
> que a nadie importa nada
> y en todo caso, hay tanto
> de que hablar tantas veces,
> por ejemplo del sol
> por ejemplo del sueño,
> o de lluvias insólitas
> de ceniza, o de ranas;
> o del barro que pisan
> los héroes terrenales;
> o del barco que un día
> no supo donde estaba
> y se hundió para siempre;
> o tal vez de la máquina,
> o del hombre,
> o del hambre que este hombre
> mastica junto al polvo; (9-25)

This enumeration of topics which begins with the benign examples of the sun and sleep, quickly moves to unusual natural occurrences such as a "lluvias insólitas / de ceniza, o de ranas" (15-16). These are topics of current events and curiosities, but with the following verses, Méndez increases the internal tension of the poem with references to war with its mud and heroes and the disaster of a shipwreck. With the simple mention

of "la máquina" and "el hombre," Méndez gives the reader a brief respite from the poetic tension and the deaths resulting from war and the shipwreck, and at the same time she makes an allusion to the technical advances of her lifetime (22-23). She concludes her list with a powerful image of hunger and drought: "del hambre que este hombre / mastica junto al polvo" (25-26). These verses build with examples of natural and social occurrences of disaster and suffering, reflecting concern for the condition of the world.

Although Méndez indicates that these are common topics for both conversation and poetic expression among her contemporaries, in the following verses Méndez rejects these external matters to claim an internal focus for her poetry and thus combines the genres of poetry and autobiography:

> aunque sé que todo esto
> es algo que hoy se canta
> y al cantarlo se ondea
> la bandera del día,
> quiero hablar de mí, sóla,
> frente al mundo distante,
> porque llevo en mis ríos
> la sangre que me riega
> y una voluntad mía
> me lleva donde quiero. (26-35)

Méndez recognizes that the issues listed have become more than topics for conversation, but they have become themes for poetry and popular causes of the day. In contrast, she begins laying out her own *ars poetica* by reflecting on an intimate and internal poetic focus: "quiero hablar de mí, sóla / frente al mundo distante" (30-31). Even though the poet stands alone facing a distant and uninterested world, she declares that she has the resources she needs—the blood that nourishes her and a will to accomplish her goals. The images of rivers carrying blood and irrigating the poetic

voice as well as the will that carries her provide a sense of movement and progression towards her desires. As I discuss in Chapter III, Méndez articulates a sense of embodied poetic subjectivity that flows from her body, her blood, and her will, and she declares herself to be worthy of being the focus of her poetic expression. While this section of the poem refers to creation, the next section depicts procreation.

In verse 36, Méndez returns to the refrain: "[y]o sé a nadie importa." Even though she concedes that others do not care, Méndez defies their disinterest by acting as speaking, writing subject and telling the reader what is important to her: a child born of her body, happy, alive, and in relationship with her:

> Yo sé a nadie importa
> el que tenga una vida
> salida de mi vida
> con ojos que me ven
> y labios que me ríen,
> con piececitos suyos
> que pisan ya y se mueven
> al aire que les llama.
> Así ha empezado el mundo
> piececitos pisando
> la carne que ha dolido. (36-46)

These verses disrupt the external focus by emphasizing the origins of the child from the mother's own life and body. The internal focus is also emphasized by the intimate portrait of the future infant's eyes, laughing lips, and moving feet. This description is especially poignant in contrast with the unseeing eyes, untouched hand, and unknown smile of Poem 1 (5, 14-17). Méndez then broadens her lens from the intimate interaction between the mother and child to the importance of the figure of the baby and the mother's body to the creation of the world. Méndez presents here an alternate vision of creation that begins with the interaction between a lively infant and the mother's body that gave him life, though not without pain. Thus, Méndez represents

the mother-child relationship as the initial human bond, and she elevates motherhood as a creative topic in comparison to the issues mentioned earlier in the poem.

In the final section of the poem, Méndez reflects on how motherhood, the loss of her son, and her own dark journey through grief have transformed her perception of the world:

> Desde que va esta vida,
> humana enredadera
> adosada a mi tronco,
> al azul que traspaso
> no es el azul de antes,
> ni el del mar, ni el del cielo,
> que es un azul hallado traspasando tinieblas
> junto a un sueño consciente. (47-54)

Méndez's description of the "humana enredadera / adosada a mi tronco" conveys the sense that, like a climbing vine, the infant is attached to, dependent on, and yet distinct from the mother's body (48-49). But since the death of the infant, the poet's sense of the color blue has changed and darkened. Méndez's experience of grief has at times been the dark, shadowy grief of the "tinieblas" and other times it has felt like a waking dream. This sorrow has impacted both her perception of the world and her artistic expression as she tries to describe the new colors and the new experiences. Although Méndez ends "Yo sé" with the shadows and dreams that in previous poems represented her anguish, she also presents her hopes for a healthy child one day as well as a declaration of her sense of self as a creative subject in relationship with her maternal body and maternal identity.

Conclusion

In the spring semester of 2006, I first read a handful of Concha Méndez's poems from *Niño y sombras* while working on a project for Dr. Bruce Boggs' course on 20th century Spanish Poetry. Immediately, I was struck by the depth of feeling in Méndez' maternal voice and her sorrowful lament for her son. The topic of motherhood in poetry by Spanish women poets became a focus for my scholarship and spurred my study of feminist perspectives on motherhood, Spanish women poets, and Spanish perspectives on feminism. In addition, other scholars focused on Spanish women poets, specifically Michelle Geoffrion-Vinci, Sharon Keefe Ugalde, Margaret Persín, and Janet Pérez, personally encouraged me to pursue my study of Spanish women's poetry about motherhood.

This project studied the embodied, relational, dynamic, and adaptable maternal identity; the mother's grief process in response to perinatal death; and the creative subjectivity in the twenty-eight poems that form *Niño y sombras* by Concha Méndez. In my analysis of Méndez's poetry, I explored from a matrifocal perspective Méndez's expression of her maternal identity, how the stillbirth of her son and her subsequent grief process impacted that maternal identity, and finally how Méndez affirmed herself as creative subject, using poetry to create meaning and communicate her maternal experience. In addition, the analysis of the poems provided understanding into early twentieth-century Spanish women's lived experiences of motherhood and grief. As a result, Méndez's poetry is relevant to readers because it reflects the human condition, particularly motherhood and grief in the Spanish context. My analysis has shown that the poems of *Niño y sombras* illustrate a grief process allowing the poet to remember

her son and experience her sorrow on the page. Bereft of more formal mourning rituals, by writing down her memories, experiences, and grief surrounding the loss of her son, Méndez composed these memories in a poetic ritual to recognize the significance of her child, his death, and her own heartache.

In Chapter I, "Introduction," I introduced the subject of this study and provided a synopsis of the available scholarship on Concha Méndez and *Niño y sombras*. It showed that few scholars have done a thorough study of *Niño y sombras*, and hardly any have studied the issues of motherhood and identity in Méndez's body of work. I also provided information about motherhood as a growing area of scholarship within feminism. In addition, I presented an overview of Méndez´s life and her body of work.

Chapter II, "Theoretical Foundations: Identity, Subjectivity, and Feminism," explored the philosophical theories and questions about the conception of a maternal self who is a creative subject. First, I explained Aristotelian and postmodern theories of identity, discussed the influence of binary oppositions and Cartesian separation of the mind and body, and examined the debate over essentialism in feminism and its impact on texts about motherhood and related scholarly efforts. Second, I considered several definitions of the subject and subjectivity and offered a viable theory of maternal identity and subjectivity. Third, I discussed several influences on Spanish feminism, especially theories of sexual difference.

Chapter III, "The Embodied and Relational Maternal Identity in *Niño y sombras*," analyzed the poems of *Niño y sombras* demonstrating Méndez's conception of an embodied and relational maternal identity. First, I studied Méndez's poetic expressions of her embodiment as a mother, connecting her maternal identity to her

body. Second, I explored the relational aspect of maternal identity as demonstrated in the multiple expressions of relationship between the mother and child before birth, the impact of the separation of death, and the promises of an enduring relationship after his death. I analyzed the connections between these embodied and relational characteristics of the poems with Méndez's assertions of a persistent maternal identity in spite of death.

Chapter IV, "Grief and the Effects of Perinatal Death on the Maternal Identity" analyzed the expressions of grief and loss in the poems of *Niño y sombras* and examined the effects of perinatal death on the maternal identity as it adapts to the change. I presented information on perinatal death and characteristics of parental grief including the theories of John Bowlby's phases of mourning and Ronald J. Knapp's research on common parental responses to the death of a child. It also provided information about the cultural practices surrounding pregnancy and perinatal death and discussed the genre of elegy and women's contributions to the genre. In my analysis of the poems of *Niño y sombras*, I observed Méndez's progression though several stages and characteristics of grief, in particular Bowlby's second stage of yearning and searching, as seen in the poems. The first seven poems express the most acute stage of the poet's sorrow, while later poems reflect the importance of memory to the grieving mother. The collection includes meditations on death within the contemplative tradition of the elegy, poems that display dissociation from reality as the poet struggles with the intensity of her pain and poems that depict encounters with a sense of supernatural presence. Later in the collection, Méndez shifts from her deep personal sorrow to an empathy for a world and humanity on the verge of its own traumatic series of wars and

death. These poems that reveal a broader concern for the world and the poems that reflect Méndez's process of coming to terms with her grief represent a gradual transition from acute mourning to living with her grief as well as hints of Bowlby's fourth stage of mourning in which the bereaved begins to reorganize her life and redefine her maternal identity, integrating her son's death and her own sorrow.

Chapter V, "The Maternal, Creative Subject" examined Méndez's assertions of a maternal subjectivity in *Niño y sombras*, specifically in Poem 26, "Yo sé." My analysis showed that Méndez combines her lament for the desperate state of the world and her questioning of the disregard for the worth of the individual with a declaration of her poetics. I examined the poem as an *ars poetica* announcing an internal focus for her poetry rejecting poetic topics of her contemporaries. Thus, Méndez defies indifference to define her poetic subjectivity in relationship to her maternal body and her maternal identity and elevates motherhood as a creative topic.

As an undergraduate and masters' degree student in Spanish, I was exposed to a small number of female writers, few of whom wrote from a maternal point of view. When I discovered women writers, and specifically women poets of the Generation of '27 and later, who wrote about a broad range of human experiences, including motherhood, my understanding of Spanish culture and experience was deeply enriched by these writers. Just as the epic poetry of *El cantar de mío Cid*, elegies such as the *Coplas a la muerte de su padre* by Jorge Manrique, and love poems such as those by of Garcilaso de la Vega or Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer are valued for their aesthetic worth and their expression of different aspects of the human experience, poems about motherhood and elegies for a child are worthy of being written and studied because they

also make an important contribution to our understanding of the human condition. Readers and students should be introduced to not only the heroic epic, the elegy for a father, and romantic love, but also maternal poems of love, courage, and grief. Poetry about motherhood offers the reader a unique perspective on the potential and paradoxical overlap between creating life and mourning death.

From a feminist perspective, it is important to study poetry about motherhood and to approach these poems from a matrifocal perspective. For too long, feminism and mothering were viewed as being in conflict, but more recent scholarship is pushing past the constraints of essentialism and contesting this false dichotomy. This is especially important when studying Spanish poetry about motherhood because Spanish women poets have already defined their maternal identity in complex and diverse ways.

For future projects, the concept of the embodied, relational, and changing maternal identity as well as the psychological process of grieving used in my study of *Niño y sombras* could be applied to other maternal poetic texts. In particular, I hope to continue the work begun here by studying Carmen Conde's collection *Derramen su sangre las sombras* and Juana Castro's collection *Del dolor y las alas*. Conde published *Derramen su sangre las sombras* in 1983, but she wrote the majority of the poems in 1933 about her experience of pregnancy and grief when Conde and the poet Antonio Oliver lost their only child to stillbirth (Conde, *Derramen* 9). Juana Castro wrote her collection of poems about birth and death, *Del dolor y las alas* (1982), as an elegy to her young son who died of leukemia. Like *Niño y sombras*, Conde and Castro speak through maternal poetic voices to express a strong sense of interconnection with the child. In *Derramen su sangre las sombras*, Conde expresses a strong connection

with her unborn child during pregnancy. In *Del dolor y las alas*, Castro communicates a bond with both her ill son and the fetus of a new pregnancy. Both collections make clear references to the mother's pregnant body containing another being and the coexistence of two selves—the child's self within the mother's. Conde and Castro also suggest the mother's embodied identity through their use of corporeal language referring to female anatomy and fluids—the womb, blood, breasts, and milk—with Castro using the most extensive anatomical vocabulary. While both poets use images of nature in association with pregnancy, Castro´s natural imagery is the most complex in its symbolism. In addition, Conde and Castro communicate deep sorrow at their children´s deaths and a physical and emotional void, and their collections reveal a continuing sense of interconnection between the mother and child after death. Both *Derramen su sangre las sombras* and *Del dolor y las alas* show promise as poetic expressions of maternal identity and subjectivity as well as offering insight into the mother's grief process. Other more recent works such as Tina Escaja's *Caída Libre* also offer possible opportunities for further exploration of maternal poetic expression. Finally, it is my hope that my work will encourage other scholars to approach texts about motherhood from a matrifocal perspective enriching our understanding of not only the mother's lived experience as conveyed through creative production but also of the broad range of human experiences.

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