RICE UNIVERSITY

THE CRISIS OF CONSCIENCE IN VICENTE LEÑERO'S PROTAGONISTS

by

Theresa Anne Tarlton

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Thesis Director's Signature:

Jean Lea Boorman

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ABSTRACT

THE CRISIS OF CONSCIENCE IN VICEENT LEÑERO'S PROTAGONISTS

Theresa Anne Tarlton

The present study analyzes the crises of conscience that each of Vicente Leñero's protagonists must face. Each protagonist in the novels and plays studied must come to grips with a personal problem that involves an interpretation of the Catholic faith.

A single novel or play is dealt with in each chapter. In the analysis of the works we examine the nature of the moral dilemmas encountered. We hope to show that each work bears a message important to Leñero. It seems that his purpose in writing these novels and plays is to present a defense of Christian, or more specifically, Catholic principles, and to show that his characters' struggle to find God is a problem common to all men in the world today.
To my family, friends, neighbors and teachers who have helped me so much.
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INTRODUCTION

Vicente Leñero, the Mexican novelist and playwright, was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco on June 9, 1933. He studied engineering at the University of Mexico and received his degree there in 1959, but, by the time, he had already become more interested in journalism and creative writing. Leñero studied for a time under Juan José Arreola to learn the techniques of short story writing. Helping to further his literary studies were the fellowships he received from the Centro Mexicano de Escritores (1961-62 and 1963-64) and the Guggenheim Foundation (1967-68). Although Leñero's career included working for a time as an engineer, his interest in writing led him into the media field where he wrote soap-operas and "telenovelas" for Mexican television.

Leñero's second novel, Los albañiles, won him Spain's highly regarded Premio Biblioteca Breve award in 1963. He was the first of Mexico's young generation of novelists to win an international literary prize.

Leñero tells us that his work has been influenced by the English novelist Graham Greene. From reading Greene he learned that "...there do not exist any themes which are taboo for a Christian writer." This realization inspired him to pursue many themes in his novels that deal with Catholic moral and philosophic problems.

As a man who takes his Catholic faith most seriously, Graham Greene's influence led Leñero to question many moral dilemmas that face contem-
porary man; and the consideration of such problems in the light of Christian faith becomes his main purpose in writing:

Today my religious convictions are a potent fuel activating my literary fever. In Christianity I find the indispensable charity—in its theological sense—which a novelist requires for observing, loving and trying to understand the world which surrounds us, so as to be moved by and to respond to the ebb and flow of sin and redemption and the sin once again: the conflict of today and forever.¹

It appears then that Leñero's concerns are more universal and philosophic rather than national or regional.

The preoccupation Leñero has with presenting themes relevant to a Christian point of view appears throughout his work. It is our thesis that Leñero reveals a "crisis of conscience" in each of the works under consideration. His works present various facets of this "crises" each one adding to the total picture.

We see that there are three points of importance in Leñero's presentation of his protagonists' crises of conscience. The first and most important is that, in the novels and plays we study, Leñero is consistently presenting a defense of Catholic principles. Each protagonist is involved in a struggle first to understand, and then to live by these principles. Often they must do this while moving in a contemporary world which is unsympathetic and hostile to such beliefs. It is up to the characters not only to learn what their faith demands of them, but also to struggle and suffer the consequences of taking a Christian stance in the reality of contemporary existence.

The second point is Leñero's emphasis on the human aspects of each
protagonist's dilemma. He keeps his characters human in scope; they are not larger than life. He is concerned with making his characters believable and with making their problems real. Leñero accomplishes this by emphasizing their weak points. But we come to sympathize with them because we realize that theirs are weaknesses and failings common to all men.

His refusal to idealize his characters reveals the third important aspect in Leñero's work. All of his characters are struggling to find God. Some are more successful than others. By exposing their confusions and doubts, he shows us men whose God is not easy to find; he seems to be a passive God in each of the works. In the working out of their crisis, however, we get no hint of condemnation from an omniscient source. Rather we sense the compassion of this God who allows all the complaints and sufferings of creatures to reach him. Some resolve their dilemmas—their salvation—others do not. But at no time do we see an angry God wishing vengeance upon these men.

Does Leñero offer us a solution to contemporary man's struggle to be a Christian? If it can be considered as such, the only solution that Leñero suggests to modern man is that he persist in his Christian posture. We know this because the same themes and preoccupation appear throughout the works here analyzed. He has no remedy for the crisis men must suffer. He does tell us though, that the Christian attitude is real, and must be adhered to in spite of the hardship it brings to a man living in a world hostile to such principles.

The present study is divided into six chapters, each one dealing with a novel or play that depicts an aspect of a crisis of
conscience. The works are analyzed in chronological order so as to show the consistency of theme throughout the span of these novels and plays. Chapter I deals with *La voz adolorida*, Leñero's first novel, published in 1961. In this novel the protagonist is a mentally ill young man. He is struggling for his sanity but it seems his burden is more than he can bear. He has an irrational fear of eternal condemnation.

Leñero's next novel is *Los albañiles* (1963). In it arises the question of man's responsibility to his fellow man. And in this novel more than the others, we see depicted clearly the struggle and pain a man must endure in living his life by Christian principles in today's world. Sergio is a former seminarian forced to live in the harsh and often violent world of the working class. The juxtaposition of these two contrasting types brings his dilemma into clear focus.

In Chapter III we study *El garabato* (1967), a novel that deals with a man who must choose between his faith and his natural desires. His crisis of conscience forces him to choose either to follow the moral precepts of his faith or to remain with his mistress.

*Pueblo rechazado* (1968), is a documentary play. In it we see the conflict of freedom of conscience versus the binding laws of the Church. In this drama the protagonist is striving to hear God. He, more than any of the other protagonist, personifies man's struggle to get closer to God. He undergoes a journey to deepen his faith in a controversial, but justifiable way.

The drama, *El juicio*, is considered in Chapter V. It too is a documentary. It is based on the famous trial of León Toral and Concepción
Acevedo de la Llata, who are being tried for the assassination of General Alvaro Obregón. In this play the conflict of fanaticism versus truth is presented. We see how a woman has the courage to adhere to the truth in spite of the grave consequences that await her. As a result of her fidelity to that truth, we see her final vindication.

The final work we analyze is Redil de ovejas. This is a complex novel which is valuable to our study because in it we see that Leñero is still presenting the same themes—they are still important to him. The novel is a picture of daily life in what can be said to be a Catholic world. We see the clergy and the laity, the old and the young, the fanatic and the superstitious. The protagonist is a priest who cares for his "flock of sheep." His main obstacle in doing this most effectively is his lack of humility. His crisis then consists in his struggle to learn humility.

Through an analysis of these novels and plays we readily can see the various dilemmas facing Leñero's protagonists and how he questions and attempts to seek a solution to the philosophic and religious aspects of these problems.
NOTES


2Ibid., p.152.

3Ibid., p.151

Vicente Leñero's first novel is La voz adolorida, published in 1961. The themes and preoccupations we find in this novel, interestingly enough, are carried through and dealt with in all of Leñero's subsequent works that we will study. This consistency indicates that these problems are real and important to Leñero and that rather than presenting us with solutions, he is more concerned with showing us the reality of these questions—he demonstrates how these same problems surface time and again in a variety of circumstances. He shows us, therefore, that these are universal questions common to the human condition.

In La voz adolorida, we see the particular problems of a mentally ill man. The novel consists of an uninterrupted monologue by the protagonist who relates his story to a doctor (a psychologist or psychiatrist). We learn of his past, which explains his disturbance. We learn of his present circumstance; and, most importantly, we learn of his main fear, the fear of eternal condemnation. He has moments when he expresses very intelligent ideas, and then, just as suddenly, he falls back into his non-stop ramblings. Most characteristic of his illness is his lack of control. He pays obsessive attention to unimportant details. He starts on a subject and cannot stop until he has exhausted it. Leñero arouses our pity for a man who knows he is ill but can do nothing to help himself.

The themes and two main leit-motifs that we see throughout Leñero's work appear first in this novel. Themes such as superstition, judging
one's fellow man, and guilt; and the leit-motifs of the interrupted journey and the confessional as expiation of guilt are found here.

Enrique's childhood and youth were so strange that it is easy to see how he would grow up to be ill-equipped to handle a normal life. He was raised by his two aunts who were extremely overprotective of him. He almost never leaves the house. He has no friends, no social contacts. He explains the psychological detention that his aunts subtly force upon him:

Todo había sido distinto para mí porque mis tías me tenían encerrado. No era precisamente que siempre estuviera puesto el candado...lo que sucediera era que la manera como metrataban mis tías y me seguían tratando me obligaba a estar allí sin tener ganas de salir a ninguna parte. Tener ganas, tal vez, pero no mover un solo pie, no hacer el menor intento para ir a buscar algo afuera, en la calle. ¿Qué es lo que podía buscar? No tenía amigos. No tenía sitios que ir.

It is not that his aunts are cruel; they are overly protective of Enrique perhaps in reaction to his mother's condition. She is also mentally disturbed to the point of being completely incapacitated. Carmen and Ofelia, the aunts, keep their sister locked up in an upstairs room. Enrique has never seen his mother. One day as a child, he makes up his mind to sneak into the room to see her. He imposes a very difficult task upon himself to achieve his goal. He tries to be perfectly good for a week so that his aunts will not have to correct him. In this way they will stop watching him so closely and he can get in to see his mother unawares.

To be perfect for one week is a very hard thing for a little boy
to do. Enrique might go for three days without correction—then have to be reminded to wash his hands. So he starts over. One week of perfection from that moment on:

Durante aquellos días me levantaba dispuesto a comenzar otra semana de portarme bien para después, como ya le dije, emprender la tarea de averiguar qué era lo que tenía mi madre... qué era y por qué estaba encerrada allí en su cuarto. (p. 62)

Finally he succeeds and he climbs the tree outside up to his mother's window. When he gets in, a pitiful sight meets his eyes. It is a traumatic experience for him. She is in bed, very pale and thin, with a blank stare on her face. She does not speak, nor does she recognize him. After this one and only meeting, he never sees his mother again.

Enrique passes from childhood to youth and young manhood in complete isolation. His one pastime is reading: "Nada más con ganas de leer y leer más y más libros para que el tiempo pasara pronto y a un día terminado siguiera otro día sin terminar." (p.123)

Naturally, during his adolescence he is curious about sex. Although his curiosity is a normal, healthy sign, he is convinced that sex is something dirty and evil and that he is bad for being interested in it. He has no one to talk to, so his only means of educating himself about sex is through books, and he is very cynical about it: "(Leía) de cosas sucias dichas en un tonto lenguaje científico y que no sirve más que para disimular el pecado capital de la lujuria. Explicando todo allí con diagramas, con cifras..." (p.90)

Once, on one of the few occasions he ventures outside his house, he is propositioned by a prostitute—another upsetting experience for
one so socially isolated: "...las ganas que tenía yo de haber estado con aquella mujer toda una noche larga gozando el pecado, condenándome voluntariamente después de que yo le había volteado a Dios las espaldas..." (p.91) His guilt feelings are very strong, but also he is angry at himself for his inexperience and timidity:


Enrique eventually overcomes his fear of sex enought to marry. A woman had come to live at their house at the invitation of the aunts. Enrique and Isabel become friends and eventually marry. But Enrique emphasizes the affectionate part over the sexual:

...todos los matrimonios, digo, guarden en secreto y se avergüenzen de las cosas ocultas que Dios puso en tierra para confundir más a los hombres y para castigarlos por el pecado cometido por Adán y Eva en el paraíso terrenal. (p.92)

This distorted idea of sex is probably what causes him to react so violently to something that happened to him as a child. One time he accidentally overhears the sexual sins of a woman in the confession- al. So ashamed is he of having done this that he cannot confess his eavesdropping to the priest. This convinces him that he will go to hell when he dies. And he believes that even when he becomes an adult: "...con la señal de la cruz con la que me iba a ir derecho al infierno si en aquel instante me moría." (p.61) Here the leit-motif of the
confessional indicates that confession should be an act of cleansing of guilt and of rebirth—but that in Enrique's case this power is frustrated by his own fear and superstition. And in his mind at least, the act of confessing seals his fate and destines him to hell forever. That the confessional in Enrique's instance fails to give relief or refuge as it consistently does in all of Leñero's other works, indicates that this protagonist's life is seriously disturbed—that not even the act of contrition can help him. Even in El parabató, where the protagonist suffers a profound emotional and moral crisis the confessional gives him succor. The leit-motif of the interrupted journey in Enrique's experience will further bear this out.

Having spent most of his life alone, Enrique has had a lot of time to think. His thoughts are original and show that he has the capacity to philosophize. He has the ability to see things on a universal plane. He understands men's basic problem of communicating with one another: "hay millones de ideas distintas, en cada cabeza hay un imagen diferente de lo que es, de lo que representa, de lo que significa esas letras acomodadas en tal forma que digan casa." (p.118) He compares authors, their books and ideas to the tower of Babel—all confusion:

Y entonces como usted debe saberlo, todos empezaron a volverse locos porque no se entendían...igual como sucede ahora que seguimos sin entendernos a pesar de que usamos palabras que para un grupo determinado de gente, un país digamos, tenga aparentemente un significado igual. (p.117)

Perhaps his clear perception of this problem is due to his own difficulty of making himself understood and of understanding others. He is
separated from the rest of society by his mental illness. He realizes and is able to make a sensitive distinction between sanity and insanity. He gives us a vivid description of what it is like to suffer the disorientation of mental illness:

Si usted quiere, todo es oscuro, admito que todo sea oscuro y que no entienda nada, que no pueda hacer un juicio claro, que a veces, muchas veces, no sepa decir qué horas son, o en qué mes estamos, o en qué fecha, o quién es el presidente de la República, o la capital de un país... (p.11)

He tells us that he came close to insanity, but that he never became completely insane—just ill: "Me sentí enfermo, al borde de la muerte y a un paso de lo que después supe que era la locura." (p.100)

The thing that most readily points to his illness is his constant talking. It seems that he loses control and one idea will lead him to another unrelated subject. He pays excessive attention to detail and gets so caught up in it that he loses his train of thought for minutes at a time:

Hice el intento de sacar una caja de cerillos, pero no saqué nada porque en la bolsa del pantalón nada mas traía un pañuelo, y unos cuantos cacauates, dos or tres. (p.10)

He had been trying to relate an experience to his doctor, but he gets caught up in so much inconsequential detail, that he ends up counting the number of peanuts in his pocket. It is this lack of control that makes his emotional and mental disturbance so vivid.

The recurrent theme of judging others appears for the first time
in this novel. Enrique, like Leñero's other protagonist, denounces this habit:

> Repito: no culpo a los que no pudieron oírme todo el tiempo necesario, como tampoco culpo a mis pobrecitas tías feas e ignorantes. No culpo absolutamente a nadie. Trato de comprender a los ignorantes y no hacer un juicio de sus inteligencias. Nadie tiene derecho a juzgar a nadie...ya queda dicho... porque el juicio de los hombres queda sujeto al juicio del Dios todopoderoso. (p.40)

Enrique is intelligent enough to espouse this Christian idea, as are all of Leñero's subsequent protagonist. But we see that he, like the others, has trouble in carrying out this practice in his life. He was once in a mental hospital and, after failing to convince the employees to let him out, he judges them very harshly: "...tendrán que dar cuenta a Dios cuando se vean ante su divina justicia todos muertos de miedo porque saben el peso de sus culpas, porque conocen los pecados que comitieron sirviendo para una causa injusta." (p.109)

Central to his fear of damnation is Enrique's concept of God. His faith is plagued by superstitions. Like the old woman in Redil de ovejas, Enrique has very naïve ideas about receiving Communion:

> "...que no hay que tocar con los dientes ni con el paladar sino que hay que pasarlo lo más pronto posible para no cometer un sacrilegio y hacer que el diablo se ría más, allá detrás del sagrio, escondido..."(p.56)

Such superstitions are based on fear and ignorance, but we see that even intelligent people such as Enrique have them. That he would believe such things shows that really he does not know the God he professes
belief in, nor does he understand the tenets of his Catholic faith. His faith has remained at a very infantile level. When we look at his idea of God we will see how hard it is for him to believe in his own salvation.

The idea or image he has of himself reflects the image he has of God. Unfortunately, he thinks of himself as being totally evil and worthless, and he mentions this several times. As a child he thought of himself in this way and it carried over into his adult life:

\[
\text{Yo no era bueno; yo nunca fui bueno. Yo no era m\'as que un muchachito asqueroso, pecador y diablo que se merece ir al infierno, sin oler el purgatorio. Merecia caer derecho en el infierno, llorando de rabia, con los horribles demonios negros, cenizos. (p.59)}
\]

Since he considers himself so worthless, it is a wonder to him that his God would have any interest in saving him. The main problem he has with the conception of his God is that he does not use his imagination to know him. His God is totally impersonal and lacking warmth. Enrique does not even use his own words when he speaks of God. He uses the language of the catechisms: "...el juicio de los hombres queda sujuto al juicio del Dios todopoderoso que se hizo hombre para morir en una cruz y rescatar a los pobrecitos hombres..."(p.40) What he says may be true, but his idea of God is incomplete. He sees his sins as having this effect on Christ: "ponen a llorar Jesu\'s Nuestro Se\'nor, clavado en una cruz por nuestros pecados."(p.62) He fears God, he thinks of him only as "all powerful" but he does not know God's compassion.
The leit-motif of the interrupted journey sheds light on Enrique's life and his relationship to God. The novel opens with Enrique recalling how he traveled by car with his friend Raúl Zetina. Raúl had taken Enrique from the hospital to see the doctor that Enrique tells his story to. In route, there is a violent thunderstorm with lightening striking all around them. They have a flat tire and must get out to change it in the pouring rain. It seems appropriate to call this leit-motif the interrupted journey, because, in almost each of Leñero's works, the protagonist travels by car or bus, and for one reason or another his journey is interrupted by some outside interference. In this case the journey represents Enrique's life, but what is so striking is the violence of the interruption in comparison with similar situations in subsequent works. The thunderstorm, the lightening, the darkness completely overwhelm him. This interruption symbolizes the psychological problems that the protagonist has to deal with. The violence of the thunderstorm points to the seriousness of these problems. Enrique is impotent in the face of the storm and the minor crisis. He stays in the car and leaves his friend to change the tire alone. When he sees lightening strike nearby it reminds him of God and sin: "con el rayo encima caído del cielo como para castigarnos por las culpas, por los pecados que cada uno de nosotros teníamos adentro."(p.27) His incapacity to deal with the storm and the flat tire, and the fact that it is night, indicate really that he is lost—that at this point he has little control over his life.

It is sad of course that one so preoccupied with notions of sin, guilt, faith and salvation should have such a narrow concept of God.
He cannot grow because of it. He fears condemnation, but he does not know God's compassion.

Walter Langford, in a chapter devoted to Vicente Leñero and his works, has this to say about the thematic implications in *La voz adolorida*: "A peripheral question is that concerning the faith and redemption of a mentally disturbed person." We do not agree with him that this is even a peripheral question in the novel. At no time does Leñero ask us to consider—can this mentally ill person be saved? His purpose in offering the reader a mentally ill protagonist is to make the questions concerning faith, conception of God, sin and salvation all the more acute and pressing. He succeeds in doing this because we see how religious and moral questions that a balanced and "normal" individual might ponder for a time and then reconcile or dismiss, a mentally disturbed person would take so seriously as to have their presence in his mind consume him. A mentally ill man might see these problems much more clearly because he has no defenses to throw up, no excuses for putting off thinking about them. Necessary but mundane acts are irrelevent to him if he is gripped in a struggle to understand his own destiny.

Leñero brings these questions into much sharper focus by portraying Enrique as mentally ill. But the questions remain for Christians in general. In this novel, at least, Leñero has not pointed the way towards any solution. Enrique is or could be any one of us.
NOTES

   All quotations are from this edition. Page numbers will be indicated in parenthesis.

2 Langford, op.cit. p.156.
CHAPTER II

Los albañiles, is Leñero's most widely acclaimed novel. It has received international attention ever since it won Spain's Premio Biblioteca Breve in 1963. In this novel he gives an intimate picture of life among the lower class in contemporary Mexico City. So vivid and detailed is his portrayal of these people that, at first glance, the novel seems to be of a sociological bent. We see how the characters are shaped by their environment, how they interact with one another, and how they live their lives from day to day. Yet, as Joseph Sommers points out, the novel has a more far-reaching, universal purpose than just to expose a sociological reality:

The basic puzzles with which the author confounds the reader make it clear that the Mexican setting, sharply delimited as it is, is merely the vehicle for philosophic examination of universal problems inherent in modern society. Los albañiles, remarkably sure in style and sophisticated in its narrative structure, takes the post-Revolution for granted and assumes that literature must explore the limitations of human nature, human knowledge and morality.

In this chapter, we study the universal moral and philosophic considerations dealt within the novel.

The base story line is the investigation of a murder. A detective seeks to solve the crime by interrogating all of the suspects. Although
at the novel's conclusion there has been no resolution of the crime, we do see that each had a motive for committing the murder.

The setting of the novel is a construction site in Mexico City. As the title suggests, the main characters are bricklayers and other workmen employed at a building project. There is a certain sociological slant in that there is an emphasis on the life style of these working class people. Their deprivations are brought to light here, and, with a certain irony, we see how they too are victims. The investigation of the crime shows how social and moral crimes have also been committed against the lower class working man, for each one gets the chance to tell his story to Mungfia, the investigator.

However, the more important question posed is: up to what point is one responsible for his brother? Each one of the workers that Mungfia interrogates had a motive for killing Don Jesus, the old watchman. Yet is murder the solution? Are not perhaps pity or compassion or even disgust more appropriate responses? These are the questions Leñero raises. Does he offer an answer?

Detective Mungfia's approach to the investigation of the crime lends itself to the theme. His form of questioning in a sense introduces us to the main point of the novel. Mungfia employs a low-key method to determine who committed the murder which is contrasted with the brutal yet more traditional and accepted methods of his counterparts. However, his approach, which is psychological, can be almost as grueling as a physically violent interrogation. His purpose is distinct from those of the "physical" school though. The latter procedure seeks to pin the crime on the first one who breaks under pressure. Mungfia's approach
allows the suspect to survive the questioning if he is truly innocent. His more compassionate approach seems to reaffirm the idea of caring for one's fellow men.

Of all the characters questioned, one, Sergio, stands out as the most suspect. He is also the one who most tries to live according to the Christian ideal of "I am my brother's keeper." The question of responsibility falls heavily upon Sergio because he is the most attuned to the reality of moral obligation toward one's fellow men. This question is made even more pressing by characterizing the antagonist, Don Jesús, as a repulsive, perverted, and evil person. Is the author trying to show us a Christian response to life in a world unsympathetic toward such efforts?

Each of the men that Mungía interviews had some kind of a conflict with Don Jesús which gives them sufficient motivation for the murder. Isidro, the fifteen year old errand boy is seduced by the old man into a homosexual relationship. Don Jesús also rapes Isidro's girlfriend, Celerina, who is Sergio's younger sister. Sergio, then, is suspect, with vengence as his motive. Jacinto is one of the bricklayers. Two things bring out his hatred for Don Jesús. What the old man is doing to Isidro upsets him, because he sees the boy as the son that he tragically lost. Also, Don Jesús is the only one who knows that Jacinto and El Chapo, the engineer of the project, are robbing materials from the project in order to build a house for Jacinto. They pay Don Jesús weekly to keep him quiet, still, his knowledge of their stealing is a compelling reason for them to want him out of the way. Also, Chapo and Don Jesús' much younger wife are lovers, adding to the complications and
intrigue. The last suspect is El Nene, Federico. He is the architect in charge of construction. The men nicknamed him "Baby" because his father gave his son this job in order to start him in the business. Federico knows nothing of architecture. He cheated his way through school and so learned nothing. Now faced with the job of directing a construction project, he is completely lost. He makes many mistakes and then denies them to his father, blaming the workers. He has not been keeping a record of the quantity of materials being used, which is why it is so easy for Jacinto and El Chapo to steal. His father orders him to begin keeping the books. In order to do this, Federico has to go back to the site by night and count the materials, one by one, because he cannot estimate by sight as he should know how to do. Humiliated and enraged to think that Don Jesús might have seen him, he could have killed him. These all are the theories which Mungía considers as he seeks to discover the criminal. He indeed does find that each man had serious personal grievances against Don Jesús. Yet there is no concrete evidence that points to the guilt of anyone, and all deny having killed him.

When Mungía questions Sergio García, he quickly learns to play upon Sergio's Christian consciousness. From the interrogation we learn that Sergio had been a seminarian. He had to give up his studies, though, in order to take care of his sisters, and because his eyesight was failing. As Sergio tells Mungía his story we see that, ironically, it is not only the world that impedes the presence of a Christian spirit of brotherhood; the Catholic Church, itself, is at fault too. The seminary should be the place where fraternal love is most ideally practiced. However, Sergio finds that this is not true. Sergio sincerely wanted to be a
priest and took his studies seriously, but his confessor and advisor used him as a mechanic instead. The confessor took advantage of him instead of letting him pursue his goal as a seminarian. Sergio also had the misfortune to be victim of the snobbery of the other, affluent seminarians. They ridiculed him because of the difficulties he has as a seminarian:

"las burlas de los curas del seminario: el cura que no entendió su vocación, el cura que no se puso de su parte, los seminaristas sanos, inteligentes, hijos de familias ricas a quienes no costaba esfuerzo aprender el latín porque se educaron en buenas escuelas e ingresaron al seminario después de estudiar completa en secundaria."

This description is really a criticism of the injustice that exists in class differences. The wealthy have all the advantages while the poor must constantly struggle, and still they can never hope for the privilege of those of the upper class. Even the Church, which preaches equality, poverty and humility, is guilty of abuses. The hypocrisy that Sergio must endure is even more reprehensible because it exists in the seminary where such things are condemned in theory.

Sergio's experience in the seminary was very frustrating. He found none of the comprehension which, while lacking in the outside world, should exist there. He was not encouraged or guided in his vocation. Rather, he lived in a society that followed the same rules as the secular world: the rich are successful and those less fortunate do not have the opportunity to improve themselves. The Church did not offer Sergio any guidance in living the Christian life. Out in the world once
more, he would have to live alone, without the support of people of like belief and motivation. His frustrated journey into the Church, the place of refuge and shelter, and back out again to the aloneness of the world, makes Sergio's responsibility more personal, more individual, and more serious, because alone, he bears the burden of his moral decisions.

There are a number of situations in Sergio's life where we see his Christian attitude put to the test. In Sergio's relationship to his family he displays a tolerance and good will that are remarkable considering the circumstances. He left the seminary to return and support his sisters. Celerina, fourteen, is the younger sister. His other sister is married. Her husband, her two small children, and she live in the small apartment with Sergio and Celerina. Sergio works to support all of them. One of the flaws of his character is that he allows himself to be intimidated. His sister's husband is a drunk, too lazy to work, who expects Sergio to support him. Sergio protests, but he is not strong enough to demand that his brother-in-law contribute as he should. One morning he fights with his sister about their lack of cooperation. Concha defends her husband by insulting Sergio's masculinity. Sergio demands of her: "En qué es más hombre, a ver...¿En que llega todos los días borracho?...Eso es ser hombre para ti? ¿En que te pega?..." (p.174)

Yet a few moments pass and he calms himself. Even though Concha had precipitated the argument, Sergio is the first to make amends: "Perdóname; me levanté de mal humor...Tú sabes que me da gusto poder ayudarlos." (p.174) Even though the domestic situation is far from ideal, Sergio's attitude is generous and humble—he wants to serve his family.
Just as Sergio cannot get his brother-in-law to cooperate, he also is taken advantage of by his fellow workers. Some of them steal one of his tools and, instead of trying to get it back, he saves his money until he has enough to buy another: "...eran muchos y todos estaban contra me...preferí comprarla a armar un lío." (p.105) He probably sensed the impossibility of ever getting them to admit they are wrong. He is not vengeful; his attitude is more Christ-like, that of "turn the other cheek." These experiences seem to make him bitter, yet he holds his anger inside and it makes him unable to communicate with those around him. Jacinto describes him: "...bien apretado que es, debió seguir mejor para cura y dejarse de cuentos; a todos les cae mal, nunca se acerca a los albañiles por discolo..." (p.39) His frustrations are pent up inside him so much so that he seems full of hate for people. Perhaps his bitter attitude is what makes him seem such a likely suspect. Jacinto rightly describes the contrast between Sergio's emotions and his actions: "el que tiene más cara de asesino es el Cura, el plomerito. Aunque no, porque el pobre es de los que no matan una mosca." (p.208) Sergio's cowardice enrages him but he holds all his anger inside and it only shows in his apparent misanthropy and bitterness. Yet, he knows what it is to be kind to people and to be concerned for their welfare, as he does with his family. He even tries to help Don Jesús.

Sergio seems to be a frustrated Good Samaritan. Mungía makes Sergio tell him the parable of the Good Samaritan and then applies it to his dealings with Don Jesús. He tells Mungía that once he approached Don Jesús and tried to convince him to stop drinking: "Traté de hacerlo una vez...Se burló de mí, claro. Fue inútil. Quedé en ridículo" (p.111)
Although his efforts are thwarted, he does not blame Don Jesús. He reacts in accord with Christian principles. He cannot help a man who does not want to be helped, so from a Christian standpoint the only other alternative is to have pity or compassion for the man, and not judge him. Sergio sees Don Jesús as "una víctima de los demás" (p.110), because they gave him money to get drunk with. In the interchange with Mungía he shows his Christian point of view:

"Nunca he dicho que era digno de ayuda."
"Pero sí de lástima."
"Sí, señor." (p.169)

Sergio is content to leave it at that. He does not condemn Don Jesús for his bad habits:

"Es muy arriesgado juzgar a los demás."
"¿Arriesgado?"
"Ante Dios" (p.110)

Sergio's Christian consciousness is well refined, and in tune with the demands of Catholic precepts. He knows he must respect people, even those as repulsive as Don Jesús.

Once more, this time in the form of a leit-motif, we see Sergio's attempt to help. The leit-motif is that of the interrupted journey. Sergio is on his way to work by bus sitting next to a lady passenger who is a troublemaker. She is loud and complains about the bus driver. She makes such a disturbance that the driver finally stops and forcibly puts her off the bus. Before that though, some of the other riders begin to insult her and the bus driver kicks her to make her get up. Sergio tries to keep the peace, and defends her from the others: "Déja
la, hombre... 'Déjala' volvió a decir Sergio, pero retrocediendo."(p.178) Once again he is not completely successful. He tries to do as much as he can, but the situation so upsets him that he soon gets off the bus and walks the rest of the way. This scene typifies Sergio's frustrating interactions with people. He tries to make contact, tries to assert himself but, when he comes upon difficulties, he backs off. He closes in upon himself and leaves so as not to cause even more disturbance. This leit-motif shows how he attempts to face his problems, but then gives up and runs away from them in the end, only adding to his frustration and bitterness.

Sergio is not like the other workmen. Wanting to improve himself, he attends English class at night. The situation at the school is, strangely enough, similar to that at the seminary. The directress asks Sergio if he will help paint some of the rooms in the building. She expects him to do it without pay. Sergio meekly agrees to do so. She is exploiting him just as his confessor had done. He strives to better himself but those who should be helping him only take advantage of his meek nature.

In a touching scene we see Sergio one day finally give vent to some of his emotion. After work he comes home to an empty house and begins to clean up and get ready to go to his class. As he is sitting on the bed, he begins to cry: "Por detrás de los lentes, con el índice y el pulgar de la mano derecha, se frotó los ojos. Cuando retiró la mano, dos pequeñas lágrimas temblaron en sus pestañas."(p.190) But it is only a small release considering all the frustration he bears.

Sergio's personality is convincing, because the difficulty he has
in getting along with people is a problem common to all men. What is admirable about his character is the fact that he doesn't give up. He keeps struggling to help his brother in spite of his self-defeating weaknesses. Sergio knows what he must do to live as a Christian and he perseveres in doing it.

In this analysis of Sergio, we have tried to show that Leñero portrays him as "the Christian" in this novel. Sergio offers the Christian response to the world in spite of his own very real human failings, but the world he lives in is generally hostile and unsympathetic to his Christ-likeness, for all its imperfections. Sergio is a character to be admired for the steadfastness of his beliefs, and to be pitied for his inability to overcome his crippling emotional problems.

This novel, as Sommers has pointed out, can also be considered from a universal standpoint. First of all, the manner in which Mungía conducts the investigation of the crime raises the level of the novel to one in which philosophical considerations take precedent over mere "crime solving". He seeks the truth. He goes over and over the possibilities of the crime, but accuses no one. His questioning of Sergio at times seems more like a theological polemic than a police interrogation. Lois Grossman maintains that "His real concern finally is not to determine innocence or guilt, but to find the truth."

In spite of the main philosophical and religious thrust of the novel, there is also a sociological commentary to be found. Federico, El Nene, explains to Mungía the psychology and origin of the bricklayer. It is a perceptive analysis that is quite accurate in explaining the violence and frustration inherent in their situation:
Los compesinos, los auténticos campesinos son muy diferentes... no padecen ese complejo de desadaptación tan característico de quienes dejan su pueblo, su pedazo de tierra y se vienen a la capital deslumbrados por lo que oyen decir o impedidos por la necesidad. La ambición que produce el deslumbramiento y la necesidad de ganar más dinero son los móviles de su éxodo. La realidad que encuentran en la capital es totalmente opuesta a la que habían imaginado. Viene entonces el desengaño y la frustración. (p.72)

The bricklayers are victims of their circumstance, of their dreams. Their violence and frustration may have killed Don Jesús, but it was not only he who died; "El velador de la obra. Los veladores de todo el mundo..."(p.16)

The novel gives a detailed account of the sociological dilemma of the lower class urban Mexican worker, but, as Sommers says:

Ultimately, beneath the study of the degradation which is exemplified in distorted sexual relationships, lies an examination of philosophical problems, such as the relativity of guilt, the ethics of justice and the impossibility of knowing pure truth.³

We see that Sergio belongs to the lower class in regards to his frustration and pent up rage. He, like the other working men, is frustrated by his poverty and the injustice that befalls him, as well as by his personal problems. But he stands out from his class in a significant way, and it is this difference that again raises the novel to a level of universal or philosophical speculation. He stands out as the Christian, as the one who cannot retaliate when a wrong is done to him. Setting the scene of the novel in the world of the bricklayers, a harsh and unsympathetic one, accentuates the contrast between a
Christian posture and "the world's" attitude.

Even though Sergio does not really succeed in presenting his Christianity to that world, his presence there is a message to us which underlines the need of a Christian stance. It is even more urgent in a hostile world. He shows us that there is another possible solution besides hate, even though he is not strong enough to convey the message. Sergio is our Paulian "fool for Christ". He is ridiculed just as Christ was. Yet perhaps that is the only way a Christian can exist in the world ...willing to bear the brunt of ridicule while offering an alternative to violence, corruption and vengence.
NOTES


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CHAPTER III

*El garabato* is the story of a man who must resolve an inner moral conflict. The conflict consists in the demands made by his faith and those imposed by the relationship he has with his lover. The protagonist seeks to resolve the dilemma by choosing to live by the precepts of his religious faith, consequently giving up his lover. In the end, however, the man is unable to do without his lover and chooses to return to her, still believing in the exigencies of his faith, but unable to abide by them.

The personality of Pablo Mejía Herrera, the nature of his relation with Lucy, and his concept of religious belief, all must be studied in order to understand why his moral crisis goes unresolved.

The novel is structured as a story within a story. Pablo Mejía Herrera, the protagonist, sends a copy of his novel *El garabato* to a friend (named Vicente Leñero). In his novel is contained the manuscript of a young man named Mendizábal whose work is also called *El garabato*. It is within the novel of Herrera however, that the story of a moral dilemma unfolds. The narration is in first person and the action takes place in Mexico. The protagonist of Herrera's tale is a successful literary critic by the name of Fernando J. Moreno. In a rare instance he has granted an interview to a young man. When the article comes out, so impressed is Moreno by its accuracy that he agrees to read the youth's manuscript as a favor to him.
In studying the personality of Moreno, we see that he is a man who is quite jealous of his reputation as a critic. It is unusual then that he grant young Mendizábal an interview. He fears being misunderstood or misquoted, "Pero olvidé todo esto (las lamentables deformaciones) y accedí a su solicitud reporteril." Moreno also displays an intellectual snobbery, vanity and pride in his achievements as a critic. With obvious self-satisfaction he tells us: "...ningún secreto de la novela tradicional o actualísima escapaba a mi conocimiento." (p.18) He arrives at an almost unbelievable extreme in praising his critical skills:

Así, como estaba Mendizábal, sobreponiéndose al impacto de mis objeciones, acabaría convencido de su ineptitud, así tarde o temprano. Los intelectuales del país se doblegarían con respeto, estuviesen o no de acuerdo a la cruda y valiente verdad de mis juicios literarios. (p.158)

This attitude is also evidenced in his relation to his brother. He displays a moral and theological superiority over him. His brother Adolfo has suddenly died of a heart attack. Moreno recalls discussing with him the age-old questions of the existence of God and of the final judgement. His attitude is presumptuous: "Ahora él, allá, descifrado el gran misterio ante la única Causa, reencontraba la fe de nuestros padres y descubría no obstante mis errores, mi conducta, mis indignos merecimientos, era yo, y no él quien estuvo siempre en la verdad." (p.58)

This then is the type of man who is going to face a crisis of conscience. He is proud, self-satisfied and very secure in his success and intelligence.
Moreno has a mistress, Lucy, and in examining his relationship with her, we see that he is as proud of her as he is of himself:

Nadie mejor...sabía lo que significaba para mi la literatura. Mujer de extraordino talento, dotada con un sentido crítico para mi obra que no encontré jamás...Era asimismo una amante estupenda. Nos queríamos con la pasión de una pareja de folletín romántico y en cinco años nuestra unión no había padecido fisuras. (p.19-20)

He sees her gifted with the same intelligence and sensitivity as he. He identifies her with himself so strongly that he might find it impossible to do without her. It is ironic that he would find someone and love her as he loves himself, and then be faced with a decision to leave her.

Although his decision seems sudden, it is a problem he has been struggling with from his very first night with Lucy. He had been seeing a psychoanalyst for years and together they had been trying to "desterrar de mi conciencia los sentimientos de culpa." (p.20)

When Moreno finally tells Lucy of his decision, her reaction is bitter. He tells us that she had always thought of him as a progressive Catholic, but now: "Que yo creyera en el infierno, que yo afirmaba que Dios me exigía abandonar una amante sólo porque mi esposa vivía era tan infantil, tan estúpido como seguir creyendo en el coco o en el ángel de la guarda."(p.41)

Try as he might, Moreno is unable to cease believing in his Catholic faith and its moral demands. He would much rather be free of it so that he could stay with Lucy without any feelings of guilt. His
analyst discusses with him all the newest concepts in theology hoping
to free his patient's mind of what he considers to be antiquated con-
strictions: "Tal vez los teólogos llegarán a admitir tarde o temprano
que nadie sufre la condenación eterna...los descubrimientos científicos
de la psicología moderna anticipan ya la extinción del concepto pecado
tal como tradicionalmente se ha venido entendiendo." (p.41)

Moreno's faith then is one that binds him rather than frees him.
It would seem that if a man gives up one good for what he believes to
be a greater good, he would be satisfied with his decision. This might
be the case if the protagonist truly loved what he believed in. Moreno's
faith however, is based not on love, but on fear. He is inspired to
action by a fear of death and of hell, not by an appreciation of the
good, and has a growing feeling his extra-marital liaison might condemn
him to hell:

Cree en el Dios de la religión católica
por miedo a que en verdad existiese y con
él, en consecuencia, el castigo al pecado,
el infierno, la condenación eterna. Una
fe alienadora y frustrante obsuculaba mi
libertad. (p.146)

Consequently, he is motivated to act for selfish reasons. He is
proud of his work because it shows how smart he is, he loves Lucy be-
cause she understands him, and he wants to leave her because he fears
the loss of his all important soul. His faith is imperfect. He does
not believe in God for the love of God; he believes in God in order to
protect himself, because God, heaven, and hell might all be real. For
him, it is too great a risk to ignore that possibility.
He is reminiscent of Enrique, the protagonist in *La voz adolorida*. We sense nothing of warmth or longing for union with God in their desires to be rid of sin. They have impersonal gods, who only set down rules that must be obeyed. Moreno does not pray to his God; there is no intimacy between this man and his Creator. Just as Enrique and Moreno resemble one another, they contrast completely with the Prior, the protagonist of *Pueblo rechazado*. The Prior is a man engaged in constant dialogue with his God; he is always searching for the meaning of God's will in his life.

Moreno's faith is a burden to him. He admits it. He grew up with it and cannot now ignore it or leave it behind him: "Como cualquier escolar educado en un colegio religioso y en el ambiente negativo de una familia supersticiosa y fanática, seguía yo asentando todo sentimiento moral en prohibiciones y amenazas." (p.146)

His moral undertaking is one of imposing dimensions. He is trying to give up something he loves in order to live by something he does not love. If he could transform his dread into a love of his faith then his decision would be feasible. His analyst cannot convince him to leave his faith, and he is too self-centered to love it; hence, his dilemma is all the more insoluble: "...iba yo animado por el recóndito deseo de que el analista pronunciara una fórmula mágica lo bastante efectiva para arrancarme de un solo golpe la fe sin dejar rastros, huellas, dudas." (p.59)

It is no wonder then, that his confession fails to give him the healing powers—the strength necessary to face his life alone—without Lucy. Shortly after his repentance he calls Lucy who has left for California. He renews his promises of love for her but, after he hangs up
the phone, he immediately regrets having done it. He makes his way to
the confessional once more, hoping to regain the grace he thinks he has
lost:

Arrepentido, avergonzado, dispuesto a no
cair de nuevo en trampas sentimentales...
arrojé mi confesión contra el sacerdote,
y minutos después, en el comulgatorio,
mastiqué a Cristo con rabia, con dolor,
con miedo. (p.156)

He tells us: "...yo no renuncié, no pude renunciar a mi fe." (p.146)

Finally, after much internal turmoil, Moreno decides to go back to Lucy.
It is a sudden decision: "La decisión no era de él (el analista), ni de
Lucy, ni mío ni de nadie. Tal vez era una derrota, pero no me interesaba
calificar el hecho." (p.187) Still though, he tries to rationalize this
final decision:

Mi acto era deprovisto de significación y
trascendencia. No alteraba el curso del
universo. Era un acto más entre millones,
pequeño frente a los grandes temas que con
toda justicia merecen mundial atención:
la guerra, el hambre, la miseria... (p.187)

By comparing his act to universal problems, he tries to diminish its
significance. It is only a rationalization, however. The fact that
the world will not take note of his action does not mean that he has
not compromised beliefs important to him. He does not succeed in his
attempt to conform his life to his beliefs. At the end of his narration
he even expresses a doubt that Christ is God. With all the turmoil that
precedes his final decision, we sense that he conflict has not been
resolved, that perhaps it never can be resolved. He will be with his
mistress, which will give him a large measure of happiness. But, will he be able to accept himself in his weakness? Will he always long for consistency in living his faith as he should? It seems that his inner struggle will not end in spite of his final, self-assured words:

El jet despego de la pista y yo sentí, al ascender en vuelo, que el aparato me raptaba para siempre inventando, anticipándome una muerte ante la cual yo podía escribir con su sentido absoluto (puesto que es muy probable que Cristo no sea Dios) la palabra fin. (p.187)

In spite of all his uncertainty and vacillation, his hypocrisy and egoism, we see that he has made an attempt to be honest with himself. He has sought to determine what gives most meaning to his life and to live by that.

The message of the novel it seems, is not that a man has turned his back on his faith because he lacks the fortitude to live by it, but rather, that he has been true to himself. He ends by choosing against his faith, but at least he faced the problem squarely, and honestly tried to live up to the moral demands of his religious belief. It could be argued however, that he could have sought to better understand his faith, to learn to love it. He allowed his belief to remain at the first and most imperfect level—that of fear. But that was not what he wanted. He sought all along to have his analyst dispel his superstitious notions of God, judgement and hell. His struggle was sincere and all the more realistic and believable because of the portrayal of his weaknesses and foibles which are, after all, only human.

Mention must be made of the protagonist in Mendizábal's manuscript which Moreno reads, because leit-motifs appear in the action which must
by analyzed, as they also appear in both the other works of Leñero.

One leit-motif which appears in both the "novel within a novel" (El garabato) and in Mendizábal's manuscript (also entitled El garabato), is that of the interrupted journey. Mendizábal's work is a mystery story. The protagonist, Rodolfo, is a young law student unwittingly involved in an intrigue of murder. Given a package to deliver, he is being pursued by an unknown number of people. He has just boarded a bus: "Pero no pudo permanecer mucho tiempo en el vehículo. Sentía que las miradas de los pasajeros lo enfocaban acusatoriamente." (p.127) Later he gets on another bus: "Viajando en autobús sin rumbo fijo—porque solamente viajando toleraba su ansiedad." (p.127) Again, on another bus, going to school, "Una mujer, de repugnante tipo hombruno, tomó asiento junto a Rodolfo." (p.131) It turns out that she is one of his pursures and he flees her, taking refuge in a church. His reaction is almost identical to that of Sergio in Los albañiles. The narrator tells us that Rodolfo; "Se sintió molesto. A veces, incluso, terminaba cambiándose de lugar o descendiendo del vehículo para abordar otro." (p.132) We think that this leit-motif of the interrupted journey signifies an inability of the character to deal with or to face his problems. The bus or taxi symbolizes life, and the unpleasant or threatening passengers on the bus symbolize the personal problems that the character is running away from. Sometimes though, the problems are overpowering; they are stronger than the character, and he must flee, or else be overcome and perhaps destroyed by them, as in the case of Rodolfo.

Moreno's "interrupted journey" gives an intimate look at certain of his apprehensions. One day he meets a friend on the street. Hoping
to be able to discuss his dilemma with him, he rides along with Ramón in the taxi. Once inside the car though, he worries that a taxi is not the proper place to bring up a personal problem. He wants to speak to Ramón because he, too, is a Catholic. But he limits himself to small talk: "La única charla posible fue la que sostuvimos durante el breve trayecto: mis artículos, un viaje a Oxford que él estaba por emprender... temas, todos ellos, sin interés alguno para mí..." (p.70)

This time the journey is interrupted by his own fears. He is not able to face his problem, to discuss it outright with his friend. It is a conflict that remains locked inside him. Even to his analyst he reveals only the barest facts of his decision—for he fears being criticized by him. He boards the taxi for the short trip with his friend in the hopes of receiving some advice, but he cannot bring himself to even suggest that he is having trouble. Again this leit-motif shows man in his attempts and failures at coming to grips with obstacles in his life.

The other leit-motif that appears in this work of Leñero's, as well as in his others, is that of the church and, more specifically, the confessional. After Rodolfo flees the bus with the strange woman in pursuit, he seeks refuge in a church: "Pensó que allí dentro no podrían hacerle nada." (p.134) He enters the place of safety but then, in a symbolic action, he kneels before the priest: "Llegó hasta el confesionario, y mirando con desesperada ansiedad al sacerdote cayó de rodillas frente a él para quedar en la postura común de un penitente." (p.135) The priest indeed does give him shelter and helps him to evade his pursuers. In this situation though, we think the novelist uses the leit-motif to show the confessional (or God's mercy) as the ultimate refuge for man. It is
the only thing that can really save him from evil (the pursuers).

Moreno enters the confessional twice. On occasions he mentions the anonymity of the priest: "...y en la primera iglesia a la que me llevaron mis pasos dicté de rodillas mi confesión ante un anónimo sacerdote." (p.147) His second visit to the confessional is just as anónimous: "...volví sin poder evitarlo y bajo presiones similares a las que nos hacen reíncidar en un burdel, al confesionario de una iglesia." (p.156) For Moreno it is as if some power compels him to go, and both times, it is a sudden act—he goes into the first church he finds. The act of confessing cleanses him of his guilt and he seeks strength from it. The confessional is a haven for him too. Seeking refuge there is a desperate attempt to gain the grace and strength needed to keep him fast in his decision. It is not an ultimate help for him though, for in the end, Moreno, unable to resolve the dichotomy, decides to renounce the demands of his religious belief in favor of the woman he loves.
NOTES

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CHAPTER XV

According to Leñero, his two act play, Pueblo rechazado, is classified as "Teatro Documental". He bases his work on an actual occurrence. Abbot Gregorio Lemercier introduced the practice of psychoanalysis in his monastery in 1961. Although a monitum had been issued against any such practice, Abbot Lemercier persisted in his decision until he was relieved of his duties as abbot in 1966. The entire episode was very controversial for the Church, and Lemercier ended by renouncing the official orders as did some of the members of his community. In September of 1967 he was reduced to the lay state.

While remaining faithful to the main facts of this historic episode, Leñero presents a drama that deals with a crisis of faith. The action takes place in the monastery of Santa María de la Resurrección in Cuernavaca, México. It is the time of Vatican Council II, 1962-1965. The Council was the Church's attempt at "aggiornamento"—an effort to mondernize the Church—to make itself intelligible and meaningful to 20th Century man.

Lemercier's experiment was certainly in keeping with the spirit of Vatican II—the spirit of updating its practices and beliefs to be more in step with contemporary life. The Church was in a period of transition when Lemercier entered into conflict with her. As previously stated, a monitum was declared against the practice of psychoanalysis except in grave circumstances, yet the Church was beginning to consider the possibility of new practices. Pope John XXIII had convened Vatican II to explore,
among other matters, just such possibilities of the Church in the modern world.\textsuperscript{4}

In the play Abbot Lemercier is known simply as the Prior. The Prior acts in accord with his conscience and hence comes into direct conflict with the officials of the Church. The play documents this conflict, but it also deals with the personal resolution of a crisis of faith within the Prior and the monks under his care. Secondary conflicts include the Prior's differences with the analyst, with some of his monks, and with the four choruses which consist of Catholics, of reporters, of psychoanalysts, and of monks. These choruses have the function as the consciousness and commentators of the groups they represent. They react to the Prior's action. Even more important than these external conflicts is the internal conflict of the protagonist, the spiritual awakening that the Prior undergoes. He experiences three separate awakenings, or realizations. From each of these awakenings, the action of the play takes a new direction. Each revelation comes as he is praying alone, to God. We could say, ultimately, that the Prior's main action can be defined as striving to hear God.

As the play opens we see that the Prior is beginning to understand that the monks' faith is suffering due to their personal emotional and mental problems. This opening scene is very ironic. A priest is giving the Chorus of Catholics a tour of the monastery. He is praising its tradition and beauty. They are touring it as if it were a museum—something dead and of the past. But also the priest reminds them: "Demos gracias por este monasterio. Mientras exista, podemos estar seguros de que el Señor vive entre nosotros." (p.26) As the Prior makes the rounds
of his monastery though, we see that exactly the opposite is true. Spiritually, these monks are dying. One he finds on the cell floor in fetal position, whimpering. Others are busy making drawings and paintings to sell, interested only in how much money they will make from them. Another he finds visiting with is over-protective mother. He discovers two more in a dark cell in a homosexual embrace. Another monk is icily reading aloud from a thick theology book, his scholasticism having robbed him of all human warmth. And finally the Prior awakens one of the monks from a nightmare. As he relates his dream to the Prior, we see that it is a portent of what is to come: He dreams that the Prior sets fire to the monastery: "Era usted. Lo vi. Traía una antorcha en la mano y prendía fuego a mi cama. Lo vi...Las llamas encendieron la celda...y usted continuaba en medio del fuego, ardiéndose..." (p.31) His dream anticipates the controversy which will challenge and eventually destroy the Prior's monastery—and interestingly, it is a controversy that he himself initiates.

The Prior's decision to seek help for him and his monks through psychoanalysis is a startling and frightening thing even for him to do. We see that this is so because when the analyst does come—the Prior fears that he is the devil. He sends for him and yet, a bit superstitious perhaps, he fears him. He cannot be blamed though, because psychoanalysis is a new technique to him and it is forbidden by the Church. But, most importantly, he accepts the analyst's challenge: "Si en realidad quiere enfrentarse al diablo, búsquelo en el fondo de usted mismo y lo encon_trará." (p.34) The analyst challenges him to study himself, to undergo psychoanalysis.
By seeking help through psychoanalysis the Prior is affirming the human-ness of his condition and the human aspect of his relationship with God. To reach God on his supernatural level, the Prior and his monks must first be able to accept themselves on their human level:

**Analista:** ¿El (auxilio) de su Dios no basta?

**Prior:** Necesito el de usted. Para llegar a Dios necesitamos ahora el auxilio de usted. Por eso lo he llamado. (p.38-39)

The Prior identifies their search with Christ's. He sees that it is necessary to know themselves as men in order to truly begin to know God:

Para penetrar en Dios, tenemos antes que penetrarnos mismos, hermanos. Para dialogar con el Padre tenemos que seguir el camino del Hijo, que se encarnó en nuestra piel. Tomar cruz y renunciar a todo. (p.39)

Faith is the theme central to this play. The Prior gives us his definition of faith in the first act and this sets the tone for the rest of the drama:

Mi fe es una búsqueda que no puede frenarse, que no tolera miedos, que no acepta derrotas. Necesito saber, bajar al fondo de mi propio infierno y enfrentar la verdad, cualquiera que ésta sea. (p.40)

His kind of faith, that is, faith as quest, leads him almost naturally to psychoanalysis. He is accused of lack of faith for what he does—but actually his faith is proved to be more authentic by his thorough search for truth via psychoanalysis.

During the first act the Prior discovers two truths that seem to be paradoxical. His awakening to these truths leads him to his third
and final realization which is a synthesis of the first two and which brings about the resolution of the play.

During Mass, the parable of Zacchaeus is read. On hearing it, the Prior begins to meditate on its meaning. He identifies with Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus had climbed a sycamore tree to get a better view of Jesus as he passed by. Suddenly Christ stops and bids Zacchaeus to come down for he wants to stay in Zacchaeus' home that night. This is a greater fortune still—much better than just being able to glimpse him. The Prior realizes that this is what Christ is asking of him and of him and all men—to let him stay in their houses—in their souls. In his meditation, the Prior explains to God that he too had climbed a sycamore because he was too short to see Jesus through the crowd. The sycamore tree for him was the monastery. But now, after thirty years in the monastery, he feels abandoned by God. He cannot see him, he cannot hear him:

Por eso dejé la muchedumbre; la muchedumbre de mi familia...Jesús yo te he buscado en esta montaña. Treinta años viviendo arriba del sí comoró...y tú no estás conmigo. ¿En dónde estás Jesús? Responde. Tu silencio me inquieta. (p.42-43)

He realizes that in spite of his efforts, his sacrifices, he has lost God. The very next scene shows the analyst in session with the monks. The monks seem to be extensions of the Prior. They, like their abbot, must search within themselves in order to believe in God with a faith purified of false motivations.

By the end of Act I the Prior expresses an idea which is an antithesis to his meditation on the parable of Zacchaeus. Through analysis he has been able to embrace the world and to accept himself as he
is. He wants to know the world before turning his back on it, or running from it. He sees that he needs to enter (accept) the world because Christ is waiting for him there—just as Christ had waited for Zacchaeus in the crowd below the sycamore. He waited for Zacchaeus to come down and give him shelter in the midst of all the people. This idea is just a further interpretation of the parable. But for the Prior it is of utmost importance. That he has realized all this shows that he now knows God does not demand a renunciation of the world—he wants to be accepted in man's home as it is:

Bajo rápidamente porque me llamas, porque has llegado...¿Conmigo en mi casa tal como es? ¿en medio de la multitud, en medio de mis amigos, en medio de mis hermanos y hermanas?...Sí, espera un momento: ahora mismo bajo y te recibo. (p.57)

The transformation that the Prior undergoes is a healthy sign. He is jubilent in the acceptance of his own humanness.

Christ resides with humanity. This is what the Prior has awakened to—it is the opposite of what he had thought. Now he sees that he does not have to retire from the world to meet God. But must he be in the midst of the world to find him? As he faces his conflicts he learns the answer to this question too. He could not hear God at all before, but now psychoanalysis has helped him.

As in his other works, Leñero in this play deals with the paradox of "good" Catholics and their lack of faith. Often, those who consider themselves "good" Catholics are really fanatics, and quite defensive and aggressive when anything threatens the secure idea they have of themselves. Two groups in the play portray this type of "good" Catholic: the chorus
of Catholics and the cardinals—the church officials who come to render judgement on the Prior's supposed disobedience. Is the Prior disobedient? Has he ignored the monitum? He maintains that he has not. Leñero has captured very well the prodding, insistent nature of the reporter. The reporters are the ones who spur the Prior to explain his position and why he has taken it:

Reportero: ¿Qué opina del mónitum?

Prior; colérico siempre: ¡No he desobedecido! En este monasterio yo soy la autoridad... ¡Fuera de mi casa!

Otro reportero: Según el mónitum, sólo por una razón grave se puede recurrir al psicoanálisis.

Prior: El equilibrio psíquico siempre es razón grave, estúpido! (p.48)

This is his defense. The mental health of his monks is at stake. For him this is grave enough reason to recur to psychoanalysis. The visiting cardinals do not agree though—they believe that he has disobeyed.

The Prior makes a very true comment about the Church hierarchy, and what he says applies to all fanatic Catholics in Leñero's work:

"¡No tienen fe en su fe. También al oír hablar de ciencia y el nombre de Freud los pone histéricos...No monseñor, Roma no es prudente, Roma es cobarde." (p.51)

In Act I it is significant that two monks speak defending psychoanalysis. Their support of it shows that it really has been effective. The chorus of Catholics shout that the Prior will destroy all faith with psychoanalysis:
Coro de catolicós: Ha vendido el monasterio al enemigo. ¡Le ha abierto las puertas de su casa! ¡Le ha convidado su pan!... ¡Ha escandalizado a su pueblo! Ha desobedecido a su Iglesia! (p.58)

The monk's testimony though shows that their faith has not been destroyed, but rather has been deepened and purified by psychoanalysis:

Monje 1: No hemos perdido la fe. Si usted piensa que un medio humano, como el psicoanálisis, hace perder la fe, es que usted considera que la fe es puramente humana. Es que usted no tiene fe. (p.76)

This speaks to all of Leñero's characters who lack faith—even though they think they are strong in it. For example, as we see later, the mass demonstrators in Redil de ovejas think it is up to them forcibly to convert the world—they have no faith in God's saving grace.

Monje 2: Someterse al análisis es mostrar que se cree en la fe. Es un desafío por amor a la verdad, pero también el mejor homenaje que un hombre puede rendir a Dios, que es la fuente de la fe. (p.76)

What was once feared by the monks has now strengthened their faith and has enabled them to love God more. It is interesting because their quest for truth can be defined in terms of the three virtues, faith, hope and charity. Through faith, the Prior had hope in the healing powers of psychoanalysis, and this led him and his monks to charity—a truer love of God for his sake. And this is the purpose of faith—to lead man to love of God. The Prior admits to us that faith and hope are his strongest
virtues. Psychoanalysis becomes like a new profession of faith for these men.

But perhaps the Prior's break with tradition is too radical. All the ideas, which are fomenting in Act I, come to the fore in Act II. In this act the Prior offers Mass and shocks us with his version of the Our Father: "...perdona mis ofensas como yo perdono las tuyas." (p.78) He is forgiving God for the imperfections in the world: "Padre, yo te perdonó por tu ruiseñor que se fatiga...te perdonó todo el mal que siento que me haces..." (p.78) According to the precepts of his faith he is not justified in doing this. Why does he then? Perhaps to convince himself that his God is not awesome or fearful—that he too has qualities that men can identify with. It is one way of getting closer to God—by putting him on a human level.

If the Prior has strayed too far from orthodox theology, he still maintains a link through his friend, the bishop who acts as an intermediary between him and the Church. He represents the new Church, the one Pope John envisioned—the one that needs to become more modern. He tells the Prior: "Estoy con usted porque pienso que debemos abrirnos a toda nueva aportación científica, a todo diálogo, a toda opinión." (p.49) The bishop is also a historical figure. He is the actual bishop of Cuernavaca up to this date.

He explains to the cardinals their need to be more open. They are men who are resisting the new trends in Church life. The Prior's endeavor is one of these new awakenings, however, they want only to repress it and maintain the status quo. But the bishop tells them: "Y me serfa muy difícil dejar de creer en un hombre que lucha por continuar su búsqueda
dentro de la Iglesia, comprendanlo: siempre dentro de la Iglesia." (p.66)

He respects the freedom of a man to live his faith as he sees fit—he sees that the Church is big enough to house diversity.

With Vatican II the Church strove to update itself, to become more in tune with contemporary life. But because of her size and her responsibility to all her members, she could not move as fast as some would prefer. In many ways she was stepping from medieval times into the present. She wanted to be open to new ideas but she could not adopt them overnight. Perhaps this is the reason for the Prior's unfortunate suspension. The bishop, we think, personifies the Church's cautious, yet open, attitude to coming changes:

Comprenda, padre, ya no soy un hombre joven ni puedo cambiar fácilmente mis hábitos, mi estilo y mi manera toda de ser... Trato de respetar su libertad y de buscar en sus intenciones al Espíritu que nos habla. Porque el Espíritu sopla donde lo tiene a bien. Y yo quisiera pensar que ha soplado sobre esta colina. (p.89)

The "new winds" that are blowing in the Church are the spirit of Vatican II. The bishop speaks of these winds several times in the play.

It is significant that he calls the Prior "mi gran amigo". (p.64)

This suggests that there will be a happy resolution to the problem—even if, at the play's conclusion, there is no resolution between the Prior and the Church's officialdom. The bishop's kindness and openness is a good omen that speaks of a tolerance and willingness to change that the Church will embrace: "Las entenderemos tarde o temprano. Ahora soplan nuevos vientos sobre la Iglesia." (p.50)

The Prior's final and synthetic understanding comes as a climax near
the end of the second act:

Comprendo ya, Jesús. Poco te interesa como es mi casa: que sea la de abajo o la de arriba, en medio de la muchedumbre o lejos de la multitud, allá donde se calla, allá donde hay niños o ahí donde sólo hay un padre. Poco te importa todo eso. Sólo una cosa te importa, Jesús, que sea mi casa: la casa donde yo pueda crecer, la casa donde pueda florecer...Debo escoger bien mi casa porque también será la tuya. (p.80)

The realization is a synthesis of his two previous mediations, because now he realizes that no matter where a man is, in the world or separate from it, God will come to him. Psychoanalysis—an in-depth study of himself—led him to understand that what God wants is for man to be himself and to be able to continue to grow as he was meant to. When a man is able to follow this path—then God is with him.

Through analysis the Prior finds God again; and his monks, those that choose to stay with him, find renewed health and a stronger, purer faith to live by. He gains new confidence from his journey into psychoanalysis—so much confidence that, when the Church relieves him of his duties as abbot, it is not hard for him to decide to leave the monastery altogether. He and some of the monks leave and form their own community. At the play's end, the bishop cautions the Prior as he sets out on his new way of life:

**Obispo:** Tenga cuidado.

**Prior:** Tengo coraje y fe. No necesito más para el camino. (p.91)

His faith, which he describes as a quest, and his courage have led him
out of the Church—but to a closer and more real communion with God.

In this play, Leñero shows that the way to faith in God is through man's won humanness. Man must arrive at God by using human means. Psychoanalysis in this instance shows the Prior and monks the truth about themselves and thus allows them to clearly consider the reality of God, free of superstitions, emotional complexes and guilt.

The problem of faith is more sharply defined in this play than in the other works of Leñero. In this play the protagonist seeks God directly. The other protagonists have some outside reason that causes their crisis. Fear of damnation is the reason in La voz adolorida and El garabato. As we shall see, the protagonist's problem in Redil de ovejas is the acquisition of humility. To love as a Christian is Sergio's problem in Los albañiles and, as our study will substantiate, a defense of truth reveals La Madre Conchita's conception of God in El juicio. The setting of monastery in Pueblo rechazado also makes the problem more acute. The Prior already has been directly seeking God for thirty years. Of all the protagonists he is the one most conscious of his dependence on God. He has put himself directly in God's hands and only waits to hear his voice so he will know what direction to take next.

It seems that, through this play, Leñero is trying to show the necessity of letting the human element in faith come forth so that man can get closer to God. He shows us that the Church prohibits this, but that the "winds of change" within bring the promise of a fuller consciousness and deeper understanding for her members.
NOTES

   All quotations are from this edition. Page numbers will be indicated in parenthesis.


3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.
CHAPTER V

El juicio, a play that deals with an historical occurrence, is based on the trail of José de León Toral and Concepción Acevedo de la Llata. The dialogue is taken from the actual testimony of the trial in which the state seeks to prove the guilt of the two defendants in the assassination of General Alvaro Obregón. On the surface, the play appears to be merely an almost verbatim dramatization of this famous trial. But the world of the play encompasses more than that.

There are certain advantages to using the format of a courtroom drama. The tensions and conflicts are well defined, there is a built-in suspense in awaiting the verdict, and there is a definite resolution at the play's end.

The characters, with their internal and external conflicts, are presented to us not only as individuals, but also as types and symbols. Dimensions and characteristics of the two protagonists are presented, but more importantly, León Toral and La Madre Conchita can be seen as personae of Leñero. They represent the philosophic hemispheres of Leñero's dilemma.

The thought or image of the play becomes then a philosophic and moral dialogue. The main questions posed are: Are personal religious reasons justification enough for killing someone? And, can a person be held responsible for another's action simply because he holds an influence over him? The principal characters of the play embody these questions.
In analyzing and contrasting these characters, we can see how they represent philosophical attitudes of Leñero.

León Toral is the assassin who willingly confesses his deed immediately after he is apprehended. La Madre Conchita is being tried as the "intellectual authoress" of the crime. Toral tells us that he assassinated Obregón for the good of the country—for the good of all Catholics in Mexico.

The year is 1928 and during this period in Mexican history, the Catholic Church suffered repression at the hands of President Calles. Obregón, the president-elect, upon taking office, expected to continue the repressive anti-Catholic policies. A group of conservative Catholics organized, calling themselves the "Cristeros". They protested the anti-Catholicism and sought to regain their lost rights. On July 31, 1926, all Catholic churches had closed in protest of the "Ley Calles". Those priests and nuns who did not leave Mexico, now went underground. This is the chaotic mood of Mexico when Toral commits his crime. It was thought that he was someone's paid gunman, but after being tortured, he still would not admit to acting for anyone. The historian, J. Patrick McHenry, states that, "A thorough investigation proved conclusively that Toral was nothing more than a religious fanatic unbalanced by a persecution complex."

Leñero uses the facts of this trial to probe into the personalities of Toral and La Madre Conchita. And in his study he brings to light basic philosophic and moral questions.

The main conflict is between the defendants and the state. Toral's attorney presents an interesting defense. He maintains that Toral's act was of a socio-political nature, and that the constitution prohibits the
death sentence for political crimes. He argues that Toral committed the murder in a legitimate exercise of his rights—that he was compelled to do so for moral reasons:

José de León Toral, al privar de la vida al general Obregón, infiriéndole lesiones, quebrantó una ley penal violentado por una fuerza moral que le produjo temor fundado e irresistible de un mal inminente y grave en la persona del infractor. (p.19)

His right to practice his faith was being denied him by the state. In order to regain this right he kills the one who is violating the rights of the Catholics. But is that a strong enough reason for killing a man? According to the tenents of the faith that Toral professes, it is not.

Toral appears to be a fervent Catholic. He does not express any of the hate and bitterness against his enemy as is so characteristic of the religious fanatic. But he is unbalanced. So all-consuming is his own personal belief, that he cannot distinguish between right and wrong. He sincerely believes that it is his duty to assassinate Obregón, that God wants him to do it. He tells the court: "No tengo más que un cómplice, y ese cómplice es Dios." (p.41)

Toral is very serene, and resigned to the fact that he will probably be executed for his crime. He had expected to be killed immediately after he shot Obregón. He sees himself as a martyr, acting for the sake of all Catholics. At one point during the cross-examination, we not only see Toral's willingness to sacrifice himself, but also we see his sense of unreality. In an imaginary talk with Obregón, he thinks that the General would be perfectly amenable to the plan if only he knew of it:

Llegué una vez a imaginar esto: que la
He imagines that God has given him this task to perform. He believed that Obregón must die because he was "hurting" Toral and all other Catholics. He saw Obregón’s death as indispensable. He wanted Obregón to die in order that Christ might reign in Mexico: "...el reinado de la justicia y la caridad". (p.31)

We do not think that Leñero is giving approval to Toral’s act. He has shown us that Toral is not entirely in touch with reality. In a climactic exchange between Toral and the prosecutor we see that the very faith that Toral is claiming to defend is being negated by his action:

Procurador: 'No tengo más que un cómplice y ese cómplice es Dios.'

Toral: Si señor, eso dije.

Procurador, exaltándose:
¡Ha convertido a Dios en asesino, contra todos lo preceptos de la religión que profesa! (p.41)

For all his good intentions, Toral’s fanaticism is equal to a grave misunderstanding of his faith. Toral is one who claims Catholicism as the motive for his crime, but he is not even aware that in the commission of this crime he is grossly abusing the moral tenets of Catholic faith.

As stated previously, Concepción Acevedo de la Llata is accused of being the "intellectual authoress" of the assassination, one who had a strong moral and spiritual influence over Toral. Toral had been influenced...
by her words and applied them to what he could do to better the religious dilemma in Mexico. According to Toral, the crucial words that La Madre Conchita spoke to him were these: "Lo que sí sé es que para que se componga la cosa es indispensable que mueran Obregón, Calles y el Patriarca Pérez." (p.22) But Toral goes on to explain that she did not intend for him to take matters into his own hands:

Eso dijo La Madre Conchita, pero sólo como un comentario. No me llegó a decir: 'Es necesario que tú trabajes en esto, que busques a alguien.' Fue un comentario que pudo haber dicho un político lo mismo que miles de católicos. (p.22)

In the cross-examination of La Madre Conchita, who has pleaded innocent, she tells the prosecutor that many times before she had dissuaded people who wanted to perform acts of vengence against the government. When he asks her why then did not she dissuade Toral, she replies: "Porque nunca lo supe. ¿Cómo puedo disuadir a una persona de lo que no me ha dicho que trata de hacer?" (p.64) She maintains that, although she did say those words to Toral, she was innocent of purposely influencing him in his decision.

Like Toral, La Madre Conchita also had definite ideas about martyrdom. But significantly, unlike Toral, she is able to distinguish between right and wrong. In reference to sacrificing herself for God's will she says:

Madre Conchita: Sí es la voluntad de Dios, sin atropellar la justicia y sin atropellar la verdad, ¡qué bueno! Pero por medio de caminos torcidos y de la mentira, no.

Defensor M. Conchita: Usted quiere ir al martirio por medio de la verdad.
Madre Conchita: Sí. Así es cómo he estado presa, sosteniendo la verdad. (p.71)

She knows that justice cannot be arrived at by unjust means.

Another important aspect of Concepción Acevedo's character is her attitude regarding the judgement of others. This is a recurrent theme in Leñero's work. There is always one character who specifically voices this idea:

Medina: Dígame entonces: ¿usted cree una acción mala el hecho de haber dado muerte al general Obregón?

Madre Conchita: Que yo la hubiera cometido, sí.

Medina: Le pregunto si usted cree qué esto sea una acción mala.

Madre Conchita: Yo no soy quién debe juzgar.

Medina: Si usted ha jurado absolutamente ser veraz, ¿por qué no contesta categóricamente la pregunta?

Madre Conchita: Categóricamente no puedo juzgar este hecho.

Medina: Si usted dice que no quiere juzgar categóricamente el hecho es que no quiere contestarme.

Madre Conchita: Es que no puedo juzgar; sería la mayor imprudencia para mí, según mi religión, juzgar este hecho. (p.74)

She is incriminating herself by not simply saying that it was bad to kill General Obregón. However, she refuses to judge the morality of another man's act. She has a very refined perception of what it is to judge another man. She is faithful to the precept: "Judge not and you shall not be judged." She knows that, no matter how obvious it is that a wrong
has been done, she possesses neither the wisdom nor the omniscience to adequately judge the act. She has the humility to realize this.

It is ironic that she hold this position. The title of the play: *El juicio*—The Trial, or The Judgement, suggests that she will be judged. And, in fact, she is judged harshly. It is really not a fair trial. Hecklers are allowed in the courtroom and their presence makes it clear that the public, the judge and the jury are unsympathetic to her.

After the trial, León Toral is convicted and sentenced to execution. La Madre Conchita is found guilty also and is sentenced to twenty years in prison. At the play's end the stage darkens and a narrator tell us, in the form of an epilogue, the final facts pertinent to the lives of the protagonists. José de León Toral was executed, but La Madre Conchita, after serving twelve years and four months of her sentence, was given her freedom. We think that Leñero's inclusion of these final facts about Concepción Acevedo are significant.

The freedom that La Madre Conchita regains in the end seems to be a silent triumph. Her trial was not a just one—the agression of the public present attests to this. She told the truth and did not venture to judge another man's act. By adhering to this moral principle, she triumphs in the end—after a long period of detention. It seems that, by including the note about her eventual freedom, Leñero is pointing to the long-lasting effects of the truth that La Madre Conchita espoused.

Let us now attempt to answer the questions Leñero posed. At the beginning of the chapter we asked: "Are personal religious reasons justification enough for killing someone?" It seems that they are not. Toral was executed for such an act. In spite of the injustice of the
trial, we have seen that Leñero does not advocate assassination for personal religious reasons. Toral was presented to us as a man deluded by his own imaginings—he thought he was chosen by God to kill Obregón. We can accept the sincerity of his belief, but do not see this as a justification for his act.

The second question is: should La Madre Conchita be held responsible along with Toral for his crime? Does her influence over him implicate her? According to the testimony of both defendants, La Madre Conchita once mentioned in Toral's presence, that the religious-political conflict could only be resolved with the deaths of Obregón and two others. Toral swore that she only mentioned it indirectly, but that her words gave him the idea to kill Obregón. He told the jury that she had no hand in the plot and she agreed with his testimony. But she was convicted along with him as the "intellectual authoress". By showing the integrity of La Madre Conchita, the unfairness of the trial, and also by showing us that she regains her freedom in the end, it seems that Leñero does not intend for us to believe her to have co-responsibility in the crime that León Toral committed.

Thus we see how La Madre Conchita and León Toral represent philosophic hemispheres of Leñero's dilemma. Toral was rightly punished for his act, but La Madre Conchita was unjustly punished. She adhered to her beliefs, yet society—represented by the judge and jury—condemned her for it. In the portrayal of La Madre Conchita, Leñero is telling us of the necessity to stand by one's beliefs in spite of the hostility one will encounter in the world.
NOTES

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CHAPTER VI

Redil de ovejas, written in 1973, is the most recent novel of Leñero's that we are considering in this study, and his most complex. In fact, according to Lois Grossman, Redil de ovejas was "the novel whose complexities drove him to the theater." So complicated is the novel that, at its end, we are left in confusion. It would seem as if the uncertainty surrounding the character's identities would be cleared up, but is not.

There is one main character and several secondary characters. The male characters are all named Bernardo and the female characters are all called Rosita or la Güera. Perhaps this is a way of giving them universal and timeless dimensions—they are all Everyman. Yet the novel's conclusion becomes very confusing because Rosita blends into one person instead of being several, as they had been portrayed throughout the novel. This sudden change is not convincing though, because of chronological inconsistencies. As we finish reading the novel we are left wondering what has happened, since the ending does not fit all that has gone on before.

In spite of its confusing aspects, this novel is important because it shows that Leñero is still concerned with the themes that appear in his earlier novels and plays. It serves as a very good comparison with his other works. And it is important because it deals with problems basic to Christianity and Catholicism.

The novel is about the daily life of a priest whose basic problem
is that he must learn humility. His day to day struggle consists in accepting his office in spite of its boredom and frustration, and in learning to do so humbly. Aside from this personal struggle, the priest is also most concerned about "the lost sheep"—those who need him, but whom he cannot find. The lost sheep are personified by his sister, a woman of loose morals. He cares very much about her and tries to save her. Humility is the main theme because it is the key to his being an effective and true pastor to his "flock of sheep".

There are also secondary plots and themes. The whole novel is set against a background of a mass politico-religious demonstration of ultra-conservative Catholics vehemently protesting the threat of Communism. Participating in this rally are a man and wife, Bernardo and Rosita. Bernardo's self-assured fanaticism is effectively contrasted with his wife's secret weariness with the traditional Catholic ideal. In another sub-plot an old woman is amusing in her supersticiousness. She is a caricature of the "beatas." She influences a young boy (whom we assume to be the grown Padre Bernardo) to become a priest. Her superstition is also an effective satire of the fanaticism of Bernardo and of the mass demonstration.

All of the aspects of the novel—theme, plot, characters, and setting—combine to present to us a picture of Catholicism in Mexico. Leñero has given us a well-rounded picture of his view of Catholic life. We see it from the lay and the clerical point of view; we see it from the fanatic's and the "lost sheep's" point of view; and, we see the ridiculous extremes of superstition. All this is presented through the personal lives of the characters. To complete the picture, Leñero shows us the hysteria of
partisan Catholicism and, in an interesting conceptual comparison, he shows us the striking differences between rightist and leftist Catholics—a division brought on by Vatican II.

The time setting of the novel is important. In 1967, after Vatican II, the Church began a period of soul-searching. This is mirrored in the personal life of Padre Bernardo and also, the candid views we have of the other characters point to an uncovering of the weaknesses, the humanness of the Church and her children. It is a time of "opening up" to let the world see her sins. It seems that this novel is like a confession to the world, precipitated by Vatican II; and the confession will have a cleansing effect upon the Church—the Church in Mexico specifically. Leñero takes the leit-motif of the confessional and in this novel expands it to represent the whole significance of the novel.

We also think it is meaningful that Leñero sets his novel in Mexico. By doing this it seems that he is trying to say that Mexico is or needs to, open herself up to the world and begin the task of soul-searching.

Padre Bernardo is the character who most personifies this soul-searching. He is a man who aspired to be more than just a parish priest in an anonymous section of Mexico City. That is why he is so disenchanted with the more boring aspects of his duties. In all of Leñero's other novels, we have been with the penitent in the confessional and have seen his reaction. Now we are shown the priest's experience in the confessional. Bernardo is bored and frustrated with it: "Así todas las mañanas de todos los días, soportándolas por obediencia a su condición de siervo a quien no le está permitido desesperarse." (p.9) Even though he is disillusioned by the mundane aspects of his priestly duties, he realizes that these are
things that he must always do and he accepts it:

Un confesor que se aburre, que se distrae, que no pone generoso toda su parte que le corresponde en la ejecución del sacramento de la penitencia instituido por Jesús para que se prosiga en las almas, como dice Philipón, la obra de reconciliación los hombres con Dios en la sangre de Cristo, no es únicamente un mal sacerdote sino un mal hombre traidor a su palabra. (p.11)

His boredom and disillusionment stem from his frustrated ambitions. He had been sent to study in Rome and Madrid, and his dreams included writing a book, or having a professorship. But in spite of his pride and ambition, he is full of self-doubt: "Soy una mentira. Aunque tuviera todo el tiempo disponible del mundo no podfa escribir un solo ensayo que valiera la pena, ni siquiera un artículo de cinco páginas. Me falta preparación. Me falta estudio. Me falta talento." (p.47) He is intelligent enough to be bored "confesando beatas", and he is aware of the theologians that are beginning to revolutionize Catholic thought. He is proud of his intelligence, but quick to see that he is not truly humble. In a moment of self-criticism he sees his caricature in one of the paintings on the church. It is of the young Jesús with the doctors in the temple. Bernardo sees that one of the doctor's heads is tiny—disfigured in proportion to his body. He thinks of it as, "una interpretación satírica de todo aquel que se consagra al cultivo de la inteligencia e ignora en su tarea que de nada vale desentrañar misterios, porque los únicos que ameritan el esfuerzo resultan inapresable para la mente humana. Era mi retrato pensé, mi propia caricatura. Yo mismo." (p.15) He grasps what humility is, but he cannot yet fully practice it. In that picture he sees himself—dwarfed and
stupid for his efforts when compared to the simplicity of Christ. So he tries to put aside his frustration and humbly accept his vocation—anonymously as it may be: "Humildad, pensó; es necesario aceptar el sitio y el papel que se nos ha destinado y resignarse a no ser uno de los elegidos." (p.47) After he thinks this out, he happens to look at the painting again. But this time he sees it in a new, less harsh light. The doctor no longer looks deformed, he only seemed that way because: "su actitud de asombro ante lo que Jesús adolescente parecía indicarles con su índice en alto, lo obligaba a adoptar una postura en la que necesariamente la cabeza se inclinaba dejando atrás el tronco, pero sin repararse de él. (p.48) This is a very effective way of showing the change in mood and thought of the protagonist. His interpretation of the painting mirrors his state of mind. He no longer disdains the impotent intelligence of the doctor, he sees the doctor only in awe of the strange wisdom of the young Christ. And that is, in fact, a clear picture of humility.

For humility is, according to the Maryknoll Catholic Dictionary:

A supernatural virtue which, through the self-revelation it imparts, inclines us to know our true worth and to seek self-effacement.³

Even though the priest realizes what it is to be humble, he still has trouble applying it to his life. He tries to convince his sister to stop living with a man because it is against the law of Christ. In an imaginary conversation with her, though, he loses all sense of what humility is: "Dios es el único banquete capaz de saciar nuestro apetito... ¿No lo entiendes Guera? ¿Cómo es posible que rechaces la gracia que por mi humilde conducto se te ofrece?" (p.81) His concept of humility is false.
Thinking himself humble, he loses all humility. Even though his idea of the virtue is false in this instance, his whole life is really quite close to true humility. This becomes especially clear when we contrast him with the other Bernardo—the husband.

If Padre Bernardo represents the struggle to achieve humility, Bernardo, the husband, represents the self-assured religious fanatic. This Bernardo gives an excessive and, therefore, false importance to the practice of his faith. He goes to ridiculous extremes. It is ludicrous that he has to pray, even while in bed with his wife: "Seguramente se abrazan. Seguramente la besa en los ojos, le acaricia los senos que inicia un padrenuestro que se rompe en el así como nosotros perdonamos. (p.23)

The repeated word "seguramente" indicates his self-satisfaction. He is so sure he is right in all that he does. During their honeymoon he comforts his anxious wife by explaining to her their sacred mission of bringing children into the world: "...pero (ella) se dejó llevar por mis palabras que le hablaban de nuestra sagrada misión de traer al mundo todos hijos que Dios dispusiera y a quienes habríamos de educar según las reglas de la santa religión católica." (p.31)

So certain is he of how to manage his wife and children in accord with his "Catholic ideal" that he does not even consider the feelings of his wife, he can not even sense how she feels about her life. Rosita has to unburden herself to her confessor. The confessional becomes a place of sympathy and understanding in this case:

Estoy harta de la Iglesia, del catolicismo, de confesarme y pedir y pedir a Dios esto y lo de más allá...Y lo único que me gustaría hacer por una temporada, aunque sólo fuera por unos cuantos días, sería pecar. No sé
If she could live more naturally, without having to live up to the ideal of the "perfect Catholic family", then perhaps it would not be so necessary for her to go to the other extreme and want to sin. But the life that Bernardo and Rosita live is so full of Catholicism, they do not have the opportunity to be human, not even in bed.

Bernardo's fanaticism also makes him violently intolerant of those who he does not approve of for one reason or another. Leñero's recurrent theme of judging others appears here. In this instance the theme is brought to the fore by contrasting Bernardo with Padre Bernardo. He calls the old women who go to church "ratas de la iglesia," and the people in general are "mierda", (p.90-91) because according to him they do not value their religion. The priest in the confessional, whom we assume to be Padre Bernardo, has to counsel him against making judgements:

Caridad, Bernardo. Sólo Dios sabe lo que hay en el fondo de cada alma. Seguramente muchos de los que tú calificas a la ligera de malos cristianos, realizan en su vida diaria una labor apostólica de gran mérito a los ojos de Dios...No te precipites en juzgar al prójimo. Empieza por juzgarte a ti mismo, por analizar las causas que han impedido que tu apostolado surta efectos positivos. (p.91-92)

Padre Bernardo is not only able to give this counsel, he has also integrated it into his life. He is well aware that he cannot judge his sister—even though her way of life is condemned by society. He speaks about this to another priest: "no quería discutir, que no ha venido a juzgarla... Nunca la juzgué, padre; nunca, de veras nunca." (p.71) This idea is very
important to Lenero. In almost every work he stresses the concept that man does not possess the wisdom to judge even the most obvious of human acts. There will always be some subtlety, some unknown factor which would make it most risky for a man to presume to judge another's act. As Sergio says in Los albañiles: "Es arriesgado ante Dios juzgar al prójimo." 5

Even though Padre Bernardo does have problems in learning humility, with the statement he makes in reference to his sister, we see that he indeed has a true understanding of humility in this case. To know that he is not worthy of judging anyone is to recognize his true place before God; and his humility consists of that realization.

Another theme is Lenero's work is that of superstitions. In the practice of religion it is very easy to fall into silly superstitious habits. In Redil de ovejas, this theme is accentuated to the point of satire. The third Rosita is an old woman. She is one of the "beatas de la iglesia." Her whole life centers around the Church. But the practice of her faith is made up entirely of superstitions, some of them very amusing. The sections of the novel that deal with her are part of Padre Bernardo's boyhood past. Once he and his friends were playing ball in the street. During the game, one of the boys misses his aim and the ball breaks the old woman's window. They are all frightened to retrieve it because they think she is a witch. The next day, however, Bernardo's older brother takes him to apologize to Rosita and to work for her until the window is paid for. Bernardo is terrified, but the first thing she has him do is write fifty-odd copies of a chain letter for the Virgin Mary and distribute them throughout the neighborhood. Soon he loses his fear of her
Rosita makes Bernardo go to mass twice in the morning and this is what she tells him about receiving Communion: "...que debía de tener mucho cuidado de no tocar con los dientes porque entonces cometería sacrilegio y en lugar de recibir a Dios recibiría al diablo." (p.127)

One of Bernardo's main duties is to help Rosita baptize all the dogs and cats in the neighborhood, because if they do not get baptized, they will be condemned to hell. The most outrageous thing she has him do is regularly to take money from the poor box, which becomes her main source of income. She thinks that since she does so much for God that she earns the money: "La Divina Providencia me sostiene. Alabado sea Dios." (p.138)

Even though he is learning her crazy ways, Bernardo senses Rosita's charity and good will underneath—and this is what eventually influences him to become a priest.

It is Rosita's charity that marks the crucial difference between her superstitious devotion and the blind fanaticism of the demonstrators.

Throughout the novel the refrain of these Catholics is:

- Comunismo
- Nooooooo
- Cristianismo
- Sfffffffff. (p.32-33,36,etc.)

The mass demonstrators are reacting strongly against the threat of Communism. This public display of protest is the physical manifestation of the conceptual polemic that arose with Vatican II. In chapter eleven Leñero presents both sides of the controversy, one in each column with the titles: "A la derecha de Dios: 1967" and "A la izquierda de Dios: 1967". (p.89) Those to the right are overly zealous. They believe that: "Ser
cristiano es profesar en público la fe, es luchar en todo momento por instalar el reino de Cristo en la sociedad, es amar al prójimo por amor a Dios, y por amor a Dios hacerle abrir los ojos—a golpes, si fuera preciso—para que reconozca la verdad." (p.89) Their faith is filled with violence. They think that it is their duty to coerce people into loving God. But their attitude reveals a lack of faith. They think it is incumbent upon them to save the world; they never consider the hidden power of their God at work in the world. These conservatives call the leftists prophets of the devil, they accuse the Communists of infiltrating the Church with priests and that the leftists are materialists that exalt the memory of John XXIII. They are fundamentally opposed to the new perspectives of Vatican II.

The leftists criticize the "Blind dogmatism" of the conservatives. But their commentary lacks the bitterness and violence of their opponents. They recognize the humanness of the Church: "Es una iglesia pecadora que se equivoca a cada rato." (p.145) They realize the need for change, for an opening up to new ideas—this is an idea that is elaborated in Pueblo rechazado. They are aware of the backwardness and superstition that plagues the Church in Mexico: "¡Pobre Iglesia! ¡Pobre catolicismo a la mexicana: tan lejos de Cristo y tan cerca de la Virgen de Guadalupe!" (p.148) This backwardness and superstition is what Padre Bernardo must accept, in spite of his intelligence and openness to new theological ideas. That is his lesson in humility. As pastor he must care for all his people—the fanatics like Bernardo, the frustrated like Bernardo's wife Rosita, the rebellious like la Guera, and the superstitious like the old Rosita.

The inclusion of the Vatican II discussion shows the conceptual
awakening to the problems in the Church. The Church in Mexico, Padre Bernardo and his flock are the special representatives to us of the reality of the Church. They speak to us of her faults, her humanness, her daily life.

In spite of the novel's confusing ending, it does bear a message. We believe the uniform naming of the characters shows us that all of them are really one—that all are sheep in the fold—that all have problems but that they all live under the care of the Church of God.
NOTES

   All quotations are from this edition. Page numbers will be indicated in parenthesis.


4 Leñero, Los albañiles. p.110.
CONCLUSION

We have seen in the foregoing character study of each of Leñero's protagonists that his main concern was to present a defense of Christian principles. He did this by bringing Christian moral and philosophic ideas into conflict with other forces—circumstancial and conceptual. By discussing the possibilities of a Christian stance in the world, he was also defending the feasability of living by such principles.

Leñero makes his protagonists and their dilemmas come to life by showing us that they are fallible human beings—not idealized heroes. Thus we have been able to believe in them and sympathize with them. The two main leit-motifs in these works throw light on the nature of the protagonists' problems, and they also remind us of their understandable human frailty. The leit-motif of the interrupted journey is symbolic of the protagonists' existential struggle—how to live one's life—what choice must be made at a specific moment. The question is asked: does the protagonist succeed in facing his problem in life or not? The leit-motif of the confessional showed us men struggling for strength through the cleansing power of a source more powerful than they. By seeking strength and mercy from a Being stronger than themselves, their human dimensions are deliniated even more sharply.

In spite of the variations in situation and circumstance, the main problem for each protagonist has been to find God or to adhere to what He asks of them. Their personal struggle with their problems was also,
either directly or indirectly, a struggle to understand their God. If Enrique in *La voz adolorida* had had a clearer conception of God's mercy, perhaps then he could have begun to come to grips with his personal problems. In *Pueblo rechazado*, we saw this hypothesis clearly presented: in order to know God, you must know yourself first. There are two tasks that may be approached from either end—but they are inseparable.

In each novel and play, we have seen protagonists who espouse or struggle for a Catholic faith. It seems then, that in Leñero's world view, the Catholic Church represents Christianity. It is not an idealized or perfect Church though, and Leñero criticizes its flaws. Yet, in the final analysis, he accepts it because, as each protagonist struggles to find God, he conceives of Him in terms of the Catholic faith.

Leñero has spoken of contemporary man's need to be Christian. The solution he has offered to man has been to persist in his intent to be Christian—to persist in answering the challenges that the world offers to him. Leñero has remained consistent in presenting this idea to us. He has no easy solution—but through his novels and plays he has convinced us of the reality of the Catholic faith and of how man must struggle to interpret it, and then live by it in the contemporary world.
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AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BOOKS CONSULTED

This book briefly mentions Leñero's first two novels, but offers nothing substantial to our study.

Goić gives a generational study of Latin American writers. His study situates Leñero in the generation of '57.

The article compares Leñero's play and novel, Los albañiles. It mentions the religious aspects of the novel.

This book is very useful for its biographical information on Leñero. It also gives a synopsis of some of Leñero's novels and plays.


This book contains historical information on the trial of León Toral and Concepción Acevedo de la Llata, and information on the events leading up to the assassination of General Obregón.

This article gives a short biography of Leñero, and short analyses of three of his novels.
In different essays, the structure and technique Leñero uses in three of his novels is briefly discussed: *Estudio Q*, *El garabato* and *Los albañiles*.

This book has very valuable insights into Leñero's universal view as presented in *Los albañiles*.

This article has information concerning the nature and purpose of Vatican Council II.