

For my thesis I investigate the negative social phenomena described in Camilo José Cela's novel, "La familia de Pascual Duarte" [Pascual Duarte's Family] (1942), namely the existentialist feelings of an individual, violence and crime, cynicism and indifference, the submissive role of women in society and machismo. After analyzing the circumstances and motivations of the characters, I present a brief portrayal of peasant life in Southern Spain around the time of the Civil War. My analysis demonstrates that there is a close interrelationship among the social phenomena listed above, since ultimately they derive from the same root factors.

My paper examines the unique nature of this rural community, its customs and particularly its moral values. Individual pride and prestige are key virtues, but they rest solely on the opinions of one's neighbors in the community. Under the surface there is only hypocrisy, prejudice and malice. The characters in the novel are biased and superstitious. They blindly accept the reality of miracles and supernatural phenomena, as well as foreboding omens.

A harsh and cruel feudalism still overshadows the country, reflecting its inhabitants' primitivism and lack of culture. The community's struggle to provide the basic necessities to all its members precludes the possibility that the individual's life will have any real value or meaning. A man submits to fate, acquiesces in it and ultimately becomes a spectator to his own life.

The key issue I explore in this paper is Cela's use of violence. I have focused on this theme for several reasons. Firstly, violence is ubiquitous throughout the novel, both as a discursive mechanism that leads the characters on and as an outcome of their deeds. Their generally violent attitude reflects not only the Spanish peasants' mentality, but their environment as well.