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## **Esther Tusquets' El mismo mar de todos los veranos and "Carta a la madre": The Healing Transformation of the Mother-Daughter Relationship**

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**Esther Tusquets' *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* and "Carta a la madre": The healing transformation of the mother-daughter relationship**

**By  
Julie Petersen**

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Esther Tusquets' *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* and "Carta a la madre": The healing transformation of the mother-daughter relationship

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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore how Esther Tusquets' "Carta a la madre" can be viewed as an evolution of Elia's emotional struggles in her search for forgiveness and closure with her mother in *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*, and explain why Tusquets would chose to reintroduce these characters (or slight variations of them) to readers close to twenty years later. There are differences that exist between the works and some characters are altered, but my analysis illustrates that "Carta a la madre" is not a continuation of Elia's story, but rather an evolution of the mother daughter relationship that ultimately has the "narrative space" and the *epistolary* characteristics that allow for healing. By presenting readers with a variation of the story using another genre, Tusquets suggests that there can be closure and progress made when an external, dialogic action is taken.

Closure and resolution with the mother was not possible in *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*. Once the narrative voice steps beyond the representative thought process to action (letter writing), there is a "space" for acceptance, forgiveness and healing. Here the act of writing is both metaphorical and "emblematic." By comparing and contrasting the structure of the stream-of-conscious novel and epistolary short story in Chapter 2 we can assess the importance of the mode of narration or the means of communication and come to some agreement about the limitations and allowances that each genre provides.

Chapter 3 focuses on the similarities and differences of re-emerged archetypal characters that explore a possible resolution with similar voices but differing results. Analysis of the relationship between mother and daughter in the early work (*El mismo mar de todos los veranos* 1977) and later work (“Carta a la madre” 2006) is the focus of chapter 4. “Carta” provides evidence for the solutions we see in the evolution of the mother daughter relationship. We can begin to understand Tusquets’ rationale for her epistolary short story and analyze the requirements for conflict resolution in “Carta,” a resolution or experience that seemed impossible in Tusquets’ earlier work.

The most important thread binding the two works is the mother-daughter relationship. This relationship is central to the plot of both works and is central to the emotional and psychological development of the narrative voice. However, in *El mismo mar*, the cycle of hate and disgust is never broken while in “Carta a la madre” the epistolary narrative leads to retrospective forgiveness and, therefore, resolution. What is most compelling about this study is that “Carta” may provide a new narrative model for coming to terms with the archetypal relationship between mother and daughter for contemporary Spanish women writers.

## Introduction

Very little is known of Tusquet's personal life or how it influenced her works. It is evident that her writings do reflect her understanding of her native city's society, Barcelona, which serves as the backdrop for many of her works. She is an intensely private person who became the often-controversial writer. Since Esther Tusquets' writing style provides readers with an access to a main character's inner most emotions, feelings, and memories, these inner most tangles of thought-narrative in *El mismo mar* provided ample ground for discussion by those who found her writing anti-feminist as well as anti-patriarchy, for example. "Carta a la madre," on the other hand, has not created the controversy of the early novel that was part of the trilogy of works for which she is well-known.

Readers might turn to Tusquets' biography to find clues about the mother daughter relationship quandary or even as a means to understand her exploration of inner thoughts. They would find few direct connections. However, Tusquets lived through the entirety of the Franco era (born in 1936), which influenced her views of the world, and wrote in the freedom of post-Franco Spain. Throughout her works, characters are constantly searching for happiness, only to find themselves unable to change and to emerge to a "space" where they could find happiness or satisfaction. Nearly two decades after the publication of *El mismo mar*, however, her short story in epistolary form, "Carta a la madre," change emerges in the form of closure with a

gentle acceptance of an overpowering mother figure (Rodgers, 524). This radical change in genre and in the results is worthy of analysis.

To analyze the elements of transformation from the novel, *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* to “Carta a la madre,” it is important to begin with Tusquets’ first narrative because it is through the comparison and contrasting of method and effect that the transformation or evolution can be understood. The narrator in “Carta” is decisive and confident for example. This is not the case in *El mismo mar*. Tusquets’ descriptive and flowing prose in *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* unveils for readers the turbulent mind of the female narrator and protagonist, Elia, a product of an unloving mother and distant father.

Although the novel’s action in *El mismo mar* spans less than a month, Elia’s lengthy and, at times, interminable thoughts provide readers with insight into her past, and more specifically, her childhood in Barcelona. The novel opens with Elia returning to her childhood home, long since abandoned by her condescending god-like mother in post-war Cataluña. As she rediscovers the pieces of her personal and cultural past, she also opens up the strained relationship she has always had with her mother, her daughter, her husband, and to some extent her father.

To be able to analyze the evolution, it is important to understand how these female relationships function in *El mismo mar*. The following summary of relationships scattered through the narrative tangles in *El mismo mar* is crucial to understanding the stark differences in how the narrative voice handles the relationship with the mother in “Carta.”



In *El mismo mar* Elia's mother and her daughter serve as opposites or foils to the narrator because they value beauty and public perception whereas Elia values intellect and prefers being alone. Both women view Elia as irrational and unpredictable and treat her in a nearly condescending manner. Elia sees them as enemies who will never understand her ways.

Elia encounters several opportunities to come to grips with her past relationships but fails. For example, Elia's husband's affair is the catalyst for her homecoming, which allows her to reopen the past in order to come to grips with her present, something she has never done, as she is incapable of reconciling with her past. In a separate opportunity, Elia is introduced to Clara, a young Colombian student who attends the university at which Elia works as an art professor. They begin a month-long affair through which Elia retraces and attempts to come to grips with her past. In an effort to do so she takes Clara to the places that were most important to her as a child: the ice cream shop, her grandmother's beach house, and the opera; each serves as a pathway into Elia's unsettled past.

Finally, when it finally appears that Elia has found happiness in her life, she denies herself the opportunity and decides to return to her husband because she understands that a relationship with Clara is not possible within the societal norms and expectations of Catalonian society. There is no narrative space for self-actualization. Clara departs again for Colombia, returning Elia to her previous life and her unresolved relationships.

*El mismo mar* deceives readers into believing that happiness can be achieved for Elia, but ultimately both the circularity of the narrative and the closed “space” of Elia’s own mind illustrates her inability to progress and find happiness due to her own emotional limitations, which include her inability to resolve her childhood problems with her mother, her inability to fully commit to a relationship after Jorge’s (her first true love) abandonment and the societal limitations on a relationship between two women.

Elia’s emotional limitations and society’s limitations cause her to retreat into increased isolation as the novel comes to a close, creating a sense of circularity in which change cannot exist. The same claustrophobic narrative space can be found in subsequent novels as the protagonist narrates a series of unhappy relationships and recurring abandonment but does not find a means to resolve the anger through forgiveness. Tusquets’ *El amor es un juego solitario* (1979), *Varada tras el último naufragio* (1980), and *El mismo mar*, form a trilogy that center on variations, not chronological events, of similar experiences for Elia, who serves as the protagonist in all three novels that become increasingly more dismal, forlorn and desolate in tone. Ultimately, each novel focuses on the search for an elusive happiness that is proven to be unattainable because the character cannot surmount the suffering simply by narrating experience.

This is the clue to understanding “Carta a la madre” since it is only decades later, through an eerily similar protagonist-narrator, that the daughter character finds acceptance of her own experience and the narrative space for forgiveness through a

one-sided *dialog* that is formatted as a letter to her mother. This protagonist-narrator evokes images of the “Medusa”-like mother that is present in *El mismo mar* but through the experience of writing an active letter, the narrator finds a means of communication that serves to provide first the space for self-actualization and the possibility for closure to the series of narrated experiences from *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*.

In “Carta a la madre,” readers are presented with a daughter writing a letter to her mother explaining the mix of emotions she felt growing up, feelings that led to their estranged relationship. Below I summarize the general distresses of the daughter with the purpose of highlighting how the protagonist moves from suffering to acceptance.

At the beginning of the “letter”, the protagonist-narrator recognizes that she idolized her mother, calling her the most beautiful, the most intelligent woman, and claiming she was nearly goddess-like. However, the tone of the letter quickly turns to anger and detestation at the mother’s lack of attention or caring. In fact, the narrator appears to use the letter as a form of catharsis. Words permit all of the pain she has held inside to spill out. Through the written word—not written thoughts--, she is able to release herself from the shackles of her hate that she had not understood for decades. The letter ends by the writer claiming to have put the issues to rest in the hopes of moving forward without the weight of all of these emotions.

When reading “Carta a la madre,” it is easy to see the connections with *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*. Both works center on a daughter trying to

understand her relationship with her mother. Culturally, it would have been unacceptable to simply reject the mother, thus motivating the narrative voice to search for understanding. Whereas Elia never is able to find closure with this relationship in *El mismo mar*, the narrator of “Carta a la madre” is able to finally find peace in forgiveness. This is why “Carta a la madre” is important in the evolution of Tusquets’ female narrators: by taking action that goes beyond thought, the protagonist turned author is able to forgive and find closure.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

The evolution of the mother-daughter relationship between *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* and “Carta a la madre” has not been fully addressed in previous analysis of Tusquets’ works; however, the groundwork for evaluating the relationship can be supported by work from other critics and that is the focus of the literature review in Chapter 1. There are three main components in the evolution of the female narrator: female narrative structure, archetypes and repetition, and forgiveness. In Chapter 2, I address Esther Tusquets’ narrative and examine how it reflects the evolution of its narrator from introspective to action. Chapter 3 analyses the recurring characters and Chapter 4 explores the change in the mother-daughter relationship and provides textual support for the thesis.

Tusquets’ work, while unique, is part of a strong movement of women writers in contemporary Spanish society. It is important to acknowledge how Tusquets’ writing fits into the framework of female writing, and a good place to begin is to review the framework for women writers identified by Birtuté Ciplijauskaitė. Ciplijauskaitė’s work *La novela femenina contemporánea* examines traits and trends that are common for women writers. One of the most prominent trends in contemporary women’s writing has to do with the search for identity and Ciplijauskaitė writes about the commonality of *self-identification* and *actualization* through writing. According to Ciplijauskaitė, repetition and cycles are common characteristics in feminist writing. She explains that as women writers seek out an

identity, they must diverge from the ordered, centered discourse and pursue a discourse that is inspired in free association and a lyrical nature, instead of a discourse that follows a linear direction:

En la búsqueda de identidad se descartan lo apolíneo, el logocentrismo, el procedimiento ordenado, prefiriendo la asociación libre de inspiración dionisiaca. Con esto se introduce también una diferente percepción del tiempo; en vez de una exposición lineal, dentro de cánones racionalmente establecidos, se va hacia la sugerencia casi poética o mística y la repetición cíclica. (17)

She claims that female writers imitate a different perception of time in their writings. Their perception is not linear or chronological; instead, their perception is more cyclical, relying on free associations. Tusquets' writing exemplifies this description by pushing the limits of structure and content in *El mismo mar*. She utilizes free association and repetition throughout her novel. However, Tusquets limits her use of stream-of-conscious writing in "Carta a la madre," demonstrating an evolution on the part of the narrator from the expression of emotional thoughts in a timeless, circular narrative to purposeful, reflective thoughts and action in "Carta a la madre."

Ciplijauskaité suggests that character and narrative evolution are common in much of the female narratives and readers witness such an evolution in "Carta a la madre," an act of writing with a naratee as a destination unlike the quagmire of thoughts that readers are exposed to in *El mismo mar*. In novels considered *Bildungsroman* or in narratives that pursue an awareness called *concienciación*

in Ciplijauskaitė's chapter, the awareness is due to the "awakening" or enlightenment that a character normally receives at the end of the novel but this is not necessarily the "awakening" we, as readers, might expect. Ciplijauskaitė claims that the awakening allows characters and readers to see the limits that society has placed upon women socially or psychologically as "el despertar casi siempre es un despertar para darles cuenta de los límites impuestos" (23). In Tusquets' novel, *El mismo mar*, Elia's enlightenment leads her to return to her former life with her unfaithful husband and the continuation of unhealthy relationships with her mother and daughter. This "awakening" is not the awakening that the reader expects since it shows no progression on Elia's part. Elia's actions challenge her own perception of imposed societal limitations without allowing her to perceive the possibilities for her, as an individual, to step beyond those limitations. The point is that she is still incapable of taking action that would allow her to self-actualize and to move beyond the limits of her prior life. She gets caught in the quagmire of her own destructiveness and cannot apply the rejection or the forgiveness necessary to move forward. She can only move in circles in search of a place where she could begin such a journey but without finding the moment that would allow her to begin.

Mirella Servodidio also explains the lack of growth or progress in the narration of *El mismo mar*. Servodidio claims that the "failure of the mother-daughter mirroring bond is the driving force- both emotionally and scripturally- of the first-person narration of the heroine's life" (159). To her, the "failure" of this relationship functions as the catalyst for the events of the novel. Servodidio explains

that Elia's narrative "journey towards individualization has... never really begun" (160). Her inability to move forward, Servodidio theorizes, has brought her back to her childhood home and memories. Tusquets "jolts the reader back forty years creating a jumbled realm of *no-change*" (italics added, Servodidio 171). It is only appropriate that the novel's final sentences "Y Wendy creció" is a repetition of the epigraph, which Servodidio claims is a "further inscription of sameness and circularity" (172). The narrator's voice here is matter of fact and distant and like that of an observer who can only view outside events without being part of them. Thus, the narrator's distancing, observational stance as well promotes the cyclical structure of the narrative keeping Elia in her frozen narrative reality from which she is incapable of escaping. The narration itself does not allow space for growth but instead folds on itself as would the multiplicitous sides of a crumpled piece of paper..

The mirroring that Servodidio describes in *El mismo mar* serves to solidify the cyclical nature of the novel. Many relationships, stories and events are relived and retold and the narrative crumples against itself. At first, *El mismo mar* appears to be a *Bildungsroman*, a coming of age story, or a story of *concienciación* but as Servodidio explains, the narrative expectation "is displaced by the static patterns and frozen frames of spatial form which, instead, presents the reader with a *Bild* or a portrait of a heroine who is incapable of change" (158).

Servodidio highlights that the plot is "entirely cyclical and overpowers the linear inscription of time" (171). Just as the narrator makes references and allusions to children's literature and the places of her childhood, the repetition has purpose:



stagnation in a quagmire. The movement continues but the circularity takes the character into an eternal return going nowhere, finding no beginnings or endings, no truths, no centers, no frames. This is evident in Tusquets writing style because her sentences can go on for pages and a parenthesis might continue for lines at a time without the markings of dialogue.

If, however, *El mismo mar* is only a *Bild*, or a description of a frozen character, as Servodidio claims, then “Carta a la madre” is the completion of the *Bildungsroman*. The evolution of the free association style narration in *El mismo mar* to the poignant writing style in “Carta a la madre” demonstrates the transformation of the narrator. The transformation can only be effective by recognizing a starting point, which the narrator acknowledges in “Carta a la madre.” In Chapter 2 this transformation will be analyzed in depth in regards to the evolution of the mother-daughter relationship, which serves as the starting point for self-actualization.

To be able to discuss the mother-daughter relationship, it is important to highlight the second component in the evolution of the narrator: Tusquets’ relies on archetypes rather than highly developed characters with names and identities. As a means to understand how archetypes work, I will discuss the use of repetition and archetypes in the two works that are the focus of this thesis: *El mismo mar* and “Carta a la madre.” Chapters 3 and 4 allow readers to understand that the archetype description is particularly important in Tusquets’ works because names are rarely used to individualize the characters. Rather, the lack of a name raises the idea of their universality. Most importantly, the mother and the father are never named in either

work, and are simply referred to as mother and father or as mythological characters (like Zeus and goddess). Even the narrative voice is only named once in *El mismo mar* and is never named in “Carta a la madre,” again contributing to the universal nature of the relationships and archetypes the characters represent.

What cannot be ignored in Tusquets’ works is the pervasive relationship between the daughter and the mother archetypal figures. Most of the critics who have explored Tusquets’ writing center on the mother-daughter relationship as one of conflict but they do not all agree on the function of the relationship as I point out below. For example, Concha Alborg categorizes the different archetypes of mothers that dominate contemporary Spanish women writers’ works. Alborg classifies mothers as martyrs, monsters or muses. Drawing from research on archetypes conducted by Annis Pratt in *Dancing with Goddesses* (1994), Alborg attempts to connect her three classifications with examples from contemporary Spanish literature and her work is of interest to us here because her categories help to articulate the triangular archetypal structure of mother-child relationships. She equates what she labels the *monster mother* with Pratt’s analysis of the Medusa figure. As Pratt writes, “when we look at Medusa we see in her eye our mother’s rage, a rage often visited upon us as daughters” (3). She entrances and entices us yet frightens us.

Alborg utilizes Pratt’s Medusa in analyzing, among other works, Esther Tusquets *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* and “Carta a la madre” and points out that the mother in these works is admired but yet controlling; the relationship is one that is in constant conflict with her daughter. The archetypal mother—Medusa—

goddess is one the daughter rejects because the daughter's own reflection causes her to fear a metamorphical monstrous self-portrait: "La madre en el papel de Medusa es una metáfora para la madre admirada como una diosa, pero que es controladora, que está en conflicto con su hija quién no quiere verse reflejada en el retrato monstruoso de su madre" (14). The daughter figure rejects the mother for fear of seeing herself in her mother.

Alborg states that "Medusa es una metáfora para simbolizar la matrofobia, el odio a la madre" (14) and for this reason the Medusa-mother must be rejected and feared. She becomes the target of an expression of hatred that the daughter feels towards the mother.

Memories of an unhappy childhood are recounted by the narrative voices with the Medusa-like mother being the driving force of unhappiness in both of Tusquets' works. For example, in *El mismo mar* her mother "varyingly described as 'goddess' or 'queen' is rewritten as a supreme being of absolute power... embodying demands too rigorous to be met" (168). Because of her inability to meet these demands, Servodidio claims that Elia's "identity is locked within this house that has been 'closed,' 'sealed-off' by her mother" (161). Their lack of symbiosis in childhood caused the "sealing-off" according to Servodidio.

While Servodidio suggests that the narrator's identity has been "locked" in her childhood in *El mismo mar*, I believe the narrative is a means to unlock her identity from her mother's control. Ultimately, Elia fails to unlock her identity and free herself from the grasp, or tentacles, of her Medusa-mother; however, as I demonstrate

in Chapter 4, “Carta a la madre” serves as the key to unlock the narrator’s identity and to permit the narrative space for self-actualization.

Dorothy Odattey-Wellington argues, in contrast, that Elia’s problems with her mother are not based on problems bonding with the mother, as Servodidio argues, rather she argues that they are grounded in the mother’s patriarchal values: “Se vilipendia no porque su hija la vea como rival por el padre, sino porque aquélla, a los ojos de su hija, es promotora de los valores patriarcales” (546). This argument also carries weight as the mother is described as a domineering and forceful character in the household. Her mother represents a society within which the narrator feels like an outsider. However, in the context of my argument that “Carta a la madre” serves as a transformation for the narrator, Odattey-Wellington’s theory does not permit the same type of growth on the part of the narrator.

Repetition is also important in other characters found in the two works. The use of similar unnamed characters creates a sense of continuity between the two works. Servodidio reflects on the different mirror images that Tusquets’ uses with her characters within *El mismo mar*. Guiomar, Elia’s daughter, serves as a reflection of the narrator’s mother; Elia’s husband, Julio, is a mirror of Elia’s father. Their reflections demonstrate the circularity of the narrative, and the narrator’s inability to grow in *El mismo mar*. Additionally, both Julio and her father embody “a patriarchal order that is... irrelevant and to which she has been exiled through a maternal mediation that rejects her ‘ex-centricity’ and upholds the orthodoxy of conventional social codes” (162). Both men serve as “peripheral” figures that are not given depth

of character but they are important as purveyors of societal values and patriarchal influence. As Odartey-Wellington points out, the father “no inspira la admiración de su hija” (546) because his emotional detachment and physical absence do not cause the daughter to approve of him. The father in “Carta a la madre” also mirrors this emotionally absent father. Through the continuous repetition of characters, Tusquets creates a cyclical universe that readers already have been familiarized with in “Carta a la madre” because it provides continuity between the two narratives and supporting characters, which provides a stage for evolution to occur. This evolution is found in the form of forgiveness and closure.

Forgiveness of the mother is the third key component to the evolution of the narrator in “Carta a la madre.” Chapter 4 of this thesis provides extensive details of the evolution from *El mismo mar* to “Carta a la madre” in regards to the mother-daughter relationship and the search for forgiveness.

Understanding the relationship between mothers and daughters is vital to the understanding of the narrator’s internal struggles in Tusquets’ works. The mother-daughter relationship has been largely overlooked throughout literature until the last half century. In the seventies and eighties, many female critics began researching this void in literary criticism. Much had been written about father-son, father-daughter and mother-son relationships, but little had been explored in regards to a daughter’s relationship with her mother.

Adrienne Rich was one of the first to investigate the multiple emotions felt in the complex relationship mothers and daughters share and stated that they share “a

knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, pre-verbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other (qtd. in Hirsch: 202). This knowledge vitally connects the two women forever; however, this relationship also produces a “desire to become purged once and for all of our other’s bondage, to become individuated and free” according to Lynn Sukenick (qtd. in Hirsch 202). Because a mother is forever connected to her daughter, it is impossible for either narrator to move on without addressing their relationship with their mother.

Marianne Hirsch also analyzes the role of feminist psychoanalysis in examining the mother-daughter relationship. Hirsch explains Freud’s theory on the relationship, conceding that his theory does not encompass the complexities of the relationship. Nonetheless, it is still an important contribution towards understanding the relationship, even if it is incomplete. Freud believed that:

Girls feel ambivalent toward the mother who is both rival and object of desire. In fact, Freud emphasizes that the pre-oedipal attachment to the mother is never totally superseded by the desire for the father; neither is the oedipal rejection of the mother ever overcome. This ambivalent relationship dominates a woman’s entire life, especially her relationship with her husband or lover. (Hirsch 206)

In the case of Elia, it is true that she never can overcome the ambivalence she feels towards her mother. In fact, it dominates her whole life, and as Freud claims, affects her relationships with both Julio and Clara, as she is unable to participate in a healthy relationship with either one.

In contrast to Freud's theory, Jung also analyzed the mother-daughter relationship. His theory focused less on the role of the father figure and less on the ambivalence daughters feel towards their mothers, as Freud theorized. Jung believed that "every woman extends backwards into her mother and forwards into her daughter... The conscious experience of these ties produces the feeling that her life is spread out over generations" (Hirsch 209). The theories of Freud and Jung serve as a base from which many critics have psychoanalyzed and interpreted works by women writers. In order to understand maternal archetypes, however, I have relied on the research of Alborg and Pratt who theorize about the forgiveness every daughter must find in regards to their mother.

Pratt explains that in order to grow, the daughter figure must confront and forgive the Medusa-like mother figure :

Each poet must complete a painful quest to understand and to forgive Medusa; only by looking into her eyes and understanding what lies beneath them can we enter the healing seas of the unconscious from which rebirth is possible. (41)

Pratt believed that in literature, the child must eventually come to terms with the repressive, "bad" mother figure to evolve or be reborn, free from the fear. This process is a "quest" that many never fully complete (41). What is interesting about the quote above is the notion of "rebirth" which indicates emergence into the outside world. Pratt identifies what the character Elia did not understand: delving into one's own past and musing is part of the painful quest and journey but the journey toward

forgiveness can only be complete through emergence, through a break with the past and action that moves the suffering child toward independence.

Alborg also explains the desire to evolve and find understanding on the part of the daughter. “Medusa tiene el poder, entonces, de transformarse en musa... las hijas recuperan a sus madres, o incluso a sus abuelas; las madres dejan de ser monstrous para convertirse en la inspiración de sus hijas”(14-15). Only in understanding and forgiveness can the daughter see her mother and find inspiration in her.

Additionally, Alborg relates the Medusa figure strongly to the mother in Tusquets’ *El mismo mar*. She explains that for the main character, the mother-daughter relationship disrupts and causes problems in other relationships of her life, including her marriage: “El resentimiento de la hija en *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*(1978), por ejemplo, causado por la falta de lazos materno-filiales, es lo que lleva a la protagonista a abandonar al esposo y a su propia hija por el amor de la joven estudiante” (16). Elia never experienced the “rebirth” Pratt discussed in her analysis, thus, she is never able to heal. Because of this, according to Alborg, her relationships with her husband and daughter are brushed aside for a relationship with the young student Clara. In Clara, Elia sees hope and a chance to find her identity that has been “locked up” by her mother, but ultimately fails because she has not made her own painful quest inwards to forgive her mother and reclaim her own identity.

Alborg compares the mother as portrayed in *El mismo mar* with the mother in Tusquets’ “Carta a la madre.” She claims the main difference is that the narrator (daughter) forgives the mother: “<<Carta a la madre>> de Esther Tusquets es toda



una lista de agravios contra la madre... A pesar de adorar a su madre de niña, la hija a duras penas la perdona como adulta y ya madre ella a la vez; para ella su madre se ha convertido en monstruo” (18). Alborg sets up this thesis analysis perfectly. She explains that there is forgiveness that is present in “Carta a la madre” however does not explain why or how it exists. In the following chapters, I will expand upon the work Alborg and others have done with *El mismo mar* and apply it to “Carta a la madre.” I will explain how “Carta a la madre” serves as catharsis for the narrator. By exploring the evolution of the structure and the evolution of the characters, we can understand how forgiveness is capable in “Carta a la madre” while it was far from being possible in *El mismo mar*.

## Chapter 2: Narrative Evolution

Esther Tusquets utilized two different narrative structures when writing “Carta a la madre” and *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* to convey the narrator’s feelings towards her mother. *El mismo mar* reflects the depth of its narrator throughout the structure and flexibility provided by the stream-of-conscious, folding narrative novel form. In contrast, “Carta a la madre” follows the more abbreviated form of a letter intended for the mother and has a more direct, linear structure. Both works share a similar writing style but differ in their construction and tone, and hence their ultimate communicative goal. By analyzing the structure and tone of each of these two works, we can understand the function of Tusquets’ decision to use the epistolary structure to express the main character’s evolution and attainment of forgiveness for the mother figure.

First, we can explore the structure of the novel *El mismo mar* to understand how this narrative structure creates the space to give the characters depth. While a short story can introduce readers to strong personalities, a lengthy, folding narrative novel like *El mismo mar* gives readers a chance to get to know the characters on a more intimate level. Tusquets takes advantage of this aspect in the novel. Her descriptive writing style conveys to readers the thoughts, desires, and emotions of her protagonist, Elia. *El mismo mar* is written in first person narrative to provide readers with access to the innermost thoughts and connections that Elia makes.

In the first ten pages of *El mismo mar*, for example, readers begin to understand Elia's complex relationship with her mother: "Lo de madre es sólo el nombre con que la ligo a mí de modo harto fantasmagórico e incierto" (10). This confession, that her mother is only a mother in name alone, connected to her in a phantasmagoric and immeasurable uncertain way, sets the stage for the distance necessary for idolization, confrontation and the eventual feelings of abandonment that cycle throughout the novel in the wandering narrative voice of Elia.

The depth of character in Tusquets' novels creates characters that readers find interesting and in which they can invest some emotional energy. Tusquets provides readers with a few of these characters (primarily Elia and Clara in *El mismo mar*) and introduces characters that are to serve as foils: the mother, Guiomar (daughter), Julio (husband), and Jorge (one of the original sources of abandonment Elia experiences). The use of multiple characters allows readers to see more sides of Elia as she interacts with them. Through her relationship with her mother, daughter and Julio we understand her feelings of being misunderstood and mistreated. Through Jorge, we begin to see how his abandonment has scarred her future relationships. The development of these characters and their stories gives readers an additional perspective on Elia that is only possible in the lengthy form of the novel. In a short letter format that readers encounter in "Carta a la madre," there is no such concentration on the variety of relationships or the narrative twists that create the variety of situations that expose weakness, fragility or the eternal return of behavior. Instead, in the letter format, as we will see, the relationship is seen as established and

as one that can be viewed in the past, one from which the main character has emerged with a strong resolve and an independent voice.

We see the importance of this distancing and decision-making in the letter in the relationship of the narrative voice in “Carta” as a counterpart to the voice in *El mismo mar*. The plot of the novel has many threads; whereas “Carta a la madre” has one main theme: the mother daughter relationship that the narrative voice has survived and from which the voice has emerged. While *El mismo mar* shares a voice that attempts to emerge, this is a part of its plot. The intertwining threads of the narrative vary to a much greater extent. The strained mother daughter relationship serves as a minor storyline when compared to Elia’s relationships with Julio and Clara, for example.

Even though *El mismo mar* is classified as a novel, it does not share all of the traits of a traditional novel. Tusquets’ writing style seamlessly interweaves memories with internal thoughts and present events. Her style truly reflects how the mind of the narrative voice makes connections. Unlike the majority of novels, Tusquets avoids including dialogue until Clara utters the last phrase of the novel: “Y Wendy creció” (229). The use of dialogue breaks the internal monologue that was the form of the entire novel. The lack of dialogue is important to understanding the psyche of the narrative voice but is less common as the novel form. The stream-of-consciousness novel lacks dialogue and, subsequently, *El mismo mar* also avoids including chapter breaks. The novel is divided into sections, but these are not marked, creating the feel

of a prolonged and distorted present which, in the words of Elia, is one in which time itself has lost meaning (27).

In contrast to *El mismo mar*, “Carta a la madre” does not avoid the structure of time to communicate an emotional sentiment that reminds readers of emotions present in the novel. She utilizes the letter format to communicate a similar emotion towards the mother figure, however, even though the characters are variations on Elia and her mother in *El mismo mar*, the same sentiment carries over into “Carta a la madre,” but with a new purpose. Tusquets chooses the letter format to give the narrator the time and space to express her feelings of anger and bitterness towards her mother in a cathartic manner revealing an evolution of character. By being able to point out the faults in her mother’s behavior over her childhood, the narrator is finally able to confront her feelings and forgive her mother because the daughter character has emerged with an awareness of difference and independence.

The letter is a powerful form in this case because while it is a one-sided piece of writing that is very direct in tone, it also presupposes a reader and, in this way, can be confrontational in its intent only. By creating the necessary narrative distance of a letter, she is able to address her mother and avoid the direct confrontation with her. The narrative voice, likewise, can explain her viewpoint without fear of being chastised or interrupted. This is especially important since the narrator views her mother as controlling; a letter is something the implied reader, mother, cannot interrupt or control.

The letter format is also a private and feminine form of correspondence that in addition to giving the narrator turned writer time to express her feelings of rejection and abandonment, in a purposeful manner. Through the power of the pen, the female writer is able to convey emotions that she may not be able to say out loud in a relationship. Whether the letter ever reaches the hands of her mother is not important. The letter functions as a form of catharsis for the narrator turned writer. The transformation from thought to the written page, from stream-of-consciousness to articulated writing is the means through which she is able to create the distance in time and physical space to forgive her mother and find peace within herself as an independent voice.

Tusquets' decision to change the format of her writing from a stream-of-consciousness novel to a letter is important in advancing purpose of the mother-daughter thread from *El mismo mar*. In fact, the format for "Carta a la madre" may have been embedded in the text for *El mismo mar*. In a scene at Elia's grandmother's beach home, Elia finds a letter addressed to her from Clara. The contents of the letter are never revealed, but Elia understands the feelings that will be conveyed because, according to her own words, she has written many similar letters. As Elia reflects on how she wrote many letters when she was a teenager that were filled with anguish, delusion and uncertain thoughts that she usually destroyed before they were read, she also recognizes that some did find their narratee or implied reader. Elia reveals she was aware of a pertinent destination in time and space in her implied reader. However, at her adolescent age, she was not as aware of the ultimate power of a

letter. She identifies the content (anguish, loneliness, isolation) and a potential escape from the nocturnal frustrations but without the awareness of power of this distancing:

A mis catorce o mis quince o a mis diecisiete años... en las noches así a veces escribía una carta muy larga- acaso parecida a la que tengo ahora entre las manos-, una carta con toda la soledad y con toda la angustia de la noche, cartas arrebatadas, delirantes e inciertas, que casi siempre se rompían antes del alba, pero que algunas veces... cuando llegaba el momento en que una adolescente bien nacida podía desertar por fin de los muebles de caoba, las cortinas de tul y las consolas panzudas con espejo, y podía escapar del dormitorio y de la casa... estas rarísimas veces, una de las cartas llegaba a su destino. (121-122)

However, it is important that one of her letters did reach its intended reader when the moment came for her to desert her extravagant home. Readers can presume that this letter was intended for her mother, whom she viewed as the goddess of the household and it is an obvious allusion to Elia's doomed relationship with Jorge, whom she viewed as a potential means to escape from the consuming lifestyle of her mother.

While the letter that Elia alludes to in *El mismo mar* is not the same letter as "Carta a la madre," her allusion helps to link the two works. The narrator of "Carta a la madre" is a middle-aged writer (evidenced in being the mother of two children), not a teenager. The tone and topic of her writing, however, is similar to that of Elia for most of the work. For example, readers learn of her loathing of the Catalanian

high society and the feelings of hatred towards the mother figure. These elements are predominant in the letter as well as in the text of the novel.

It is, of course, clear that the letter in “Carta a la madre” is likely one of the “rarísimas veces” in which the letter reaches its destined reader, her beloved and hated mother, that at least in this case, was not like the countless others that were destroyed before being read (122). The step toward self-actualization in this letter is telling though, and “Carta a la madre” is an important step in breaking the cycle of loathing that is present in *El mismo mar*, even though the narrative voice is slightly altered (a variation) and the form liberates its message.

“Carta a la madre” serves as an evolution for the daughter character. Tusquets’ decision to put this variation in letterform allowed for this closure on the part of the narrative voice, which takes action as a “writer” with a message. The one-sided implied dialogic message allows the narrator to address her mother’s vanity and lack of love on her own terms. The cathartic process of writing permits her to achieve narrative distance that creates the space in which forgiveness and closure can take root. The writer moves the ever present of the novel to the present perfect (hace mucho... he bajado... ha cerrado... ha concluido... ha bajado) and finally to the present that is free from the past, free from suffering (estamos definitivamente en paz):

He descubierto que los agravios y las agresiones, si existieron, han dejado hace mucho de importarme, que hace mucho también que sin ser consciente de ello he bajado ante ti la guardia, que la historia- a



pesar de que sigamos las dos con vida- se ha cerrado, ha concluido, que ha bajado definitivamente el telón y estamos definitivamente en paz. (93)

The effect of the use of different tenses is that the tone changes at the end of “Carta a la madre” to one of acceptance. The narrator turned writer explains that even through all of the wrongs and attacks have happened, they haven’t been important to her for a many years. Distance in time and the place of proximity of character are essential. The writer articulates that the story has *concluded* and the curtain has been drawn on the past and that they (both she and her mother) are at peace for good. This closure was not achievable in *El mismo mar* because the narrative voice could never emerge from the inner monologue of Elia who by the nature of the narrative was a victim of her own thoughts that collapsed on each other, trapping her into a barrage of narrated experiences without beginning or ending. In “Carta” the narrative begins with an ending since from the first words of the title, readers know there is distance between writer and implied reader, between what is in essence “written” and therefore “past,” now read in a present by the reader. By addressing the “offenses” her mother has committed in a letter, the narrative voice and writer of “Carta a la madre” is able to forgive the past and move on for the first time (something the Elia of *El mismo mar* was never able to do).

The structural change of “Carta a la madre” and resulting change in perspective and tone are all vital in the evolution of the mother daughter relationship in Tusquets’ writing. The variations of archetypal characters like Elia and her

insensitive mother appear in this letter to demonstrate how forgiveness and closure can be achieved by addressing the past as complete and accepting it as something that is distant and resolved. This distance is what was never accomplished in *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*. The one-sided presentation of the letter functions cathartically for the narrator-writer, who is able to articulate her understanding of events that she could not have understood as a child, teenager or young woman but only now, as a middle-aged woman, can she truly forgive her aging and fragile mother. The shift in the tone from loathing to acceptance—and, one could argue, almost pity—demonstrates not only the closure on a period of admiration and hate of childhood and youth, but closure on the period when the mother was a monster, a grandiose and immense being who overshadowed every possibility of self-awareness and identity.

The exposure of distance in terms of adoration and hatred of the monstrous mother figure in “Carta” is an essential element of self-actualization. It is important to review how this distance affects other relationships with characters as part of the evolutionary process of identity as well. In the following chapter the nature of these relationships are discussed as a means to understand the crucial role of rejection and acceptance on the part of the narrator now “active” writer.

### Chapter 3: Reintroduced characters and themes

“Carta a la madre” introduces readers to characters and minor themes with which they are already familiar because the elements of the described relationship not only harkens back to characters in other novels but they are archetypal characters and, subsequently, recognizable. Although characters like the father or the husband are slightly different, the narrator and the father figure appear to be only slightly different versions of their counterparts in *El mismo mar*.

There are additional significant similarities between the two works including the depiction of the childhood home and the overarching criticism of post-war Catalan society. The inclusion of these elements provides continuity, allowing readers to associate the grievances in *El mismo mar* or with archetypal grievances with the depiction of the grievances, now past, by the narrator-writer of “Carta a la madre.” By reintroducing these more universal elements of a wife’s indifference toward her husband or a mother’s choosing to belittle her husband’s importance for her own children, for instance, Tusquets attempts to provide an archetypal environment that is similar to *El mismo mar*, providing both a necessary context for “Carta” as well as the necessary distance that will frame any further criticism and give the writer an opportunity to resolve the issues the archetypal narrator has with her mother in the novel. The two most predominant characters in “Carta a la madre” are the mother and the daughter (narrator) and both characters appear to be drawn from their equivalents in *El mismo mar*. The focus in the present chapter is on the

daughter-narrator's character as the mother and her relationship with the daughter will be addressed in Chapter 4.

The daughter in "Carta" appears to share many characteristics with Elia, but she is ultimately a slight variation of her because she is no longer just a narrative voice with a name but a writer, whose name is no longer at issue. Both "daughters" are, for the most part, unidentified women since Tusquets gives readers little information about either narrator's name or family status in either work because by naming the character, she is less universal and further from the archetype. In *El mismo mar*, for example, the narrator's name, Elia, is only mentioned once during the more than 200 pages of writing. Clearly, as Santos Sanz Villanueva points out, the pronunciation in northern Spain or Cataluña of the name Elia is similar to "ella" meaning "she" or any woman:

El nombre de pila de la mujer mayor de la trilogía, Elia, se asemeja mucho en su fonética al pronombre personal de tercera persona, ella, de modo que no nos parece que desbarremos si lo tomamos con un carácter generalizador y ejemplar (de ejemplo, no de ejemplaridad deseable). Tusquets habla de cualesquiera "ellas", restringidas por esos condicionantes de clase y de época. (48)

The "Elia" character is simply one of many possible "ellas" whose anonymity is the connection to the thoughts of all women. Similarly, in "Carta a la madre" Tusquets declines to include a name for the daughter/narrator. The anonymity of the narrator-writer helps female readers identify with her voice and her writing. She can be seen

as an “any woman.” Because she is not named in “Carta,” readers can connect the identity to many women or any woman in society.

Other similarities exist between Elia and the narrator-writer of “Carta a la madre.” Beyond their anonymous identity, both women share a similar appearance in relation to their mothers. In contrast to their very “foreign” looking mother who, in her youth commanded attention, in the daughter’s case, both narrator and narrator-writer, bemoan their very “normal” appearance. They are common and unremarkable in their own perception of themselves and in their identity in Catalan society. A brunette, for example, is an amalgam of colors and, unlike the stellar quality of being blond, is more universal. In “Carta a la madre” the narrator explains that she has very standard brunette hair (even though as a young girl she started as a blond) and unremarkable brown eyes: “Yo nací rubia, pero enseguida degeneré en castaña, tenía los ojos pardos... no llegué a alcanzar nunca tu estatura; siempre faltaron cuatro condenados centímetros” (78). Even her stature is common and a good four centimeters less than her mother’s.

For narrators in both works their appearance is a constant reminder of their common features in comparison to the extraordinary features of the mother figure. Neither imitates the beauty of their blond-haired and blue-eyed mother as both have a very “Spanish” appearance with brown hair and eyes. The importance of appearance and attractiveness to others is crucial in terms of identity. In *El mismo mar* and in “Carta” the plain and common features of the daughters are expressed as less desirable by others. In *El mismo mar*, the degeneration of extraordinary features is

the hinge upon which the daughter's identity falters because she cannot reconcile the degeneration by distancing herself in a positive way from the expectations of idealization and the extraordinary. In "Carta" the common characteristics take on a different purpose as recognition of identity as difference is no longer an emotional point of contention but rather recognition of valued difference.

There are differences between the two female narrators, of course, and they are not one in the same. First, the narrator Elia in *El mismo mar* is an only child whereas the narrator/daughter of "Carta a la madre" mentions having a brother. Another difference is the narrators' children. For Elia who is still caught in the net of her own undoing, her daughter Guiomar embodies her mother completely: "Algo hay también de esto en mi madre e incluso en la propia Guiomar- esa facilidad para encontrar motivaciones sórdidas o para provocar historias confusas" (59). In Elia's case both mother and daughter are able to manipulate others easily with the effect of alienating the narrator from both her mother and her daughter or, through extension, all women who are exceptional in their appearance, blond and blue-eyed and "foreign" or uncharacteristic of an appearance that is more southern hemisphere than northern hemisphere:

Magníficas las dos, el mismo esqueleto grande, de huesos largos y finos, la misma piel blanquísima, con transparencias y reflejos de cristal o porcelana, con la suavidad y el vello leve de los frutos y el aroma fragante de los bosques y estos ojos- idénticos ojos en las dos-

hasta qué punto, cielos, pueden ser despiadados los bellos ojos  
enormes y azules. (143)

In *El mismo mar*, Elia describes Guiomar as an equal of her own northern hemispheric mother.

Elia is imprisoned between the two women from the beginning to the end of her life by her own pejorative and biased perspective of self. She cannot find herself in her mother or in her daughter, although each should be connected. She cannot find a shared commonality in these two archetypes—not in the Northern European archetype of womanhood nor in the very fruit of her womb: “Esa Guiomar tan igual en el fondo a mi madre y también tan extranjera- aprisionada yo entre dos mujeres que me son extrañas, una al comienzo y otra al término de mi tiempo” (91).

Elia’s struggle with identity fits in with Jung’s theory that “every woman extends backwards into her mother and forwards into her daughter... The conscious experience of these ties produces the feeling that her life is spread out over generations” (Hirsch 209) however, Elia views this extension as an incarceration to which she has been condemned rather than a lengthening of her life because she considers herself an abomination and anathema to the monstrous mother or to the monstrous daughter whom she admires and despises due to her lack of self-actualization.

In “Carta a la madre” the narrator-writer indicates that she has children who are never mentioned by name, number or gender. The narrator in “Carta” is not the same woman as Elia as she presents the reader with a similar story but without the

necessary denigration of self that readers saw in the narrator of *El mismo mar*. While the universality of character continues to provide continuity to her archetypal story, the narrative perspective creates a necessary variation through the act of articulation and this voice is able to provide the change of perception that was not possible for Elia. The narrator-writer is still able to provoke some of the emotions of Elia's complex relationship with her mother and add new emotions of forgiveness and self-actualization, even freedom and closure in "Carta." The similarities of the universal archetypal character in each work is important but the act of narration is vital to the evolution of the archetypal woman in two works and this act in "Carta" provides the framework to create a space for forgiveness.

In addition to the role of the Elia to the narrator-writer, Tusquets' use of a similar father figure character serves as means to critique society as well as the relationships that are a continuation of the role of the archetypal monstrous mother in *El mismo mar* and to emphasize the change in the daughter-narrator-writer in "Carta." There are no identifiable physical characteristics or names given to the fathers in Tusquets' two works but the role of the father figure is important in each.

The employment of a nameless archetype functions to allow readers to identify the character as an example and is similar to what has been discussed above in relation to the figure of the mother, the daughter or the narrator. The father figure operates as a mostly absent figure (physically and emotionally) and, in the case of "Carta" is a figure that is unloved by his wife and therefore a pariah from the



perspective of the child who now narrates what she now feels has been an injustice or, at very least, a misfortune.

In neither works does the father figure appear to want or desire control of the household and in both works the mother figure is allowed to wield power over him and, as an extension, over the child. In “Carta a la madre,” for example, the father appears more concerned with adoring his wife even though she has no eyes for him. He is powerless and impotent in comparison.

In *El mismo mar*, Elia comments on the lack of male influence in her family tree and the lack of power any male figure has really had. The narrator does so with the use of the preterit verb tense instead of the subjunctive. The lack of influence is definitive: “Me parece como si en mi familia no **existieron**, no **hubieron** existido jamás, elementos masculinos, por más que se hayan movido hombres a nuestro alrededor y hasta hayan ejercido el poder” (141, emphasis added). As she said, it was as if they (males) never existed in her family because their influence was never felt. The use of preterit is finite and leaves no doubt for any influence they could have had, if there had been space for influence.

Curiously, the narrative voices in each work indicate that the father figures seem content when they can rely on the mother to be the head of the household while they are absent. Elia describes her father as the one who had little to do with the household or the women who lived in those spaces: “habitualmente no paraba en la casa y apenas si ponía los pies en la quinta de la abuela” (166). The father figure was as absent in his own home as he was in the home of his own mother. The narrative

voice indicates the father figure was absent to the on-goings of the household and lacked motivation to complete tasks even though he was capable of thinking up ideas: “recuerdo invariablemente a papá ideando proyectos que luego no tenía tiempo de emprender o concluir...mientras se ocupaba de otros asuntos que al parecer no le interesaban nada” (166). The indifference of the father in *El mismo mar* is significant because the daughter-narrator cannot connect with him either. The isolation from both archetypal parents leads to anguish in the narrative voice of Elia.

The father figure in “Carta” also relied on the mother heavily to run the household while he attended to his own work and he is not more powerful than the archetypal father described in *El mismo mar*. The description of a father who abdicated his responsibilities in the household is crucial since the absence of a father figure made the mother figure all the more powerful and monstrous:

Mi padre había impuesto hasta cierto punto su gusto estético y sus ideas acerca de la comodidad, en la nueva vivienda fuiste ya tú quien lo elegiste todo...Para aquel entonces papá había abdicado de cualquier presunción de poder, y hasta de opinión, en el ámbito de la vida doméstica, hijos incluidos, para ponerlo enteramente en tus manos. En parte lo hizo, pienso, por sentir cierta pereza por andar sobrecargado de trabajo; en parte, porque era eso lo habitual en el grupo social al que pertenecíamos. (77)

He left the mother in charge of the apartment, domestic life and children. The excuse that the narrator-writer provides for the father figure is that while excessive work may

have contributed to the “pereza”-laziness or fatigue perhaps—the more likely reason for abdicating responsibility and the counterbalance she needed to offset the power of the monstrous mother, was social pressure. As the narrator-writer expresses, this fact that he did nothing at home was partially because of being overloaded with work and mostly because it was normal in their social group.

The role of the father is important in *El mismo mar* and “Carta a la madre” because it allows the mother to hold nearly complete control and power over her daughter. Elia acknowledges that the abdication of the father is just as bad as the preponderance of power in her mother, but still she directs her anger at her mother, because she held the authority: “el príncipe encantador es también, como su princesa, el más vulgar de los príncipes” (170). Although the father allowed the mother to control the domestic life, in “Carta” there is no letter written to the *parents*; rather, just the mother is the object of hate because, as she recognizes in her statements, the father figure became hateful almost as an afterthought because he was, in essence, meaningless, insignificant, powerless and, most importantly, unloved and unadmired.

The father figure in both works serves as a criticism of the male’s indifference to the household and its members. On the one hand, then, the criticism is centered on a lack of balance and even a lack of mutual affection in the households in an archetype of Catalonian society. Elia and the narrator-writer of “Carta a la madre” indicate their father’s emotional and physical absence was a “habitual” part of their social class (77) and therefore a result of play-acting an insignificant role. The father figure lacks any depth in character in both “Carta a la madre” and *El mismo mar* and

both characters appear to be hollow generalizations of an archetypal father who “writes” himself out of his own family life by perpetuating and imitating stereotypical behavior. The portrayal of paternal insignificance helps propel the mother figure into a more central and dominant role in the life of the narrator/daughter.

The most stinging criticism of the father figure is found in *El mismo mar*. When it is discovered that Elia’s father had an affair with Sofía, Elia’s nanny, he and Elia’s mother still attend the evening’s social gathering as if nothing had happened. Their lack of mutual acknowledgement of the events leads to a criticism of the upper-middle class, on the one hand, and to the insignificance of the father figure on the other. For Elia’s father and mother, appearances were the most important part of who they “were.” His identity as an emotional being was unimportant. What mattered was fitting the social parameters that allowed him to meet a social obligation. In the case of her mother, social obligation was no more than a prescribed physical image. She notes that her mother was the most beautiful woman and the queen of the party: “mi madre volvía a ser la más bella entre las bellas... la reina de la fiesta” (175). The identity of the mother is physical beauty and the cause for desire in others partnered with the domineering role of the monstrous mother contrasted with beautiful socialite. The identity of the father figure, on the other hand, is the *appearance* of a workaholic with an absence of emotion in relation to his home life that is *taken care of* by the perfect appearance of a competent trophy wife.

This contrast between the comfortable appearance of a controlled home life and the anguished narration of a tumultuous and confusing narrative of suffering on

the part of the archetypal daughter further demonstrates that minor role the father plays in both works is important since it places the father's indifference and absence of mutual parental love as key to understanding how a child could adore and hate the beautiful but monstrous mother. The father figure seems to function as a subordinate to the mother by staying out of her way and letting her run the household in any way she pleased and, more importantly, the father figure appears content with the maternal hierarchy in the home because it fits the stereotype he is willing to emulate.

Finally, the repeated childhood setting of the two works further serves to bind the two works together by offering a purpose for forgiveness: for each narrator, the childhood home is viewed as a refuge but it is a refuge bulging with conflict and anguish. Each narrative voice clings to her childhood reimagination of what *home* could have been. She finds that in that memory she can find resolution in a lack of love. While the daughter marvels at the generous space for loving, the mother figure detests the *home* and the space in which love (self-love or love of others) could prevail: "Ese piso magnífico en el que me sueño cada vez con mayor frecuencia por las noches y que años después te parecía demasiado oscuro" ("Carta a la madre" 77). In both works, the narrators describe the mother attempting unsuccessfully to renovate and change the apartment to be appealing to her because no matter how she changed the materials of the household, it was still devoid of what could be considered a home. The mother often describes the apartment as dark or lacking light and in a state of disorder. The house was devoid of meaning, of purpose, of delight, of unconditional love.

Elia cannot find a space for self-love in *El mismo mar* because there has never been space for meaningful love in her childhood home. Elia's return to her childhood home after Julio's final extra-marital affair can be viewed as a regression into her childhood and the many unresolved psychological and emotional problems she connects with her mother and her home devoid of unconditional love. As Mirella Servodidio observes, Elia returns to her childhood home to find her identity but: "Her identity is locked within this house that has been 'closed,' 'sealed off' by her mother, its interior furnishings homogenized and hidden by the white sheets that enshroud defining contours and boundaries" (161). For Elia, her return allows her to be confused by a supposed identity that was lost because it never completely developed in childhood nor could it mature and be relived in adulthood.

For the narrator in "Carta a la madre," the house also functions as a significant example of the difference between mother and daughter now that the narrator-writer no longer finds emptiness in her own life. The most telling change in this narrator-writer is that she forgives her mother for not loving her father and for communicating that indifference toward her husband to their children. She pities her mother, not for her early outstanding beauty and ability to cause men to seek out her beauty, but for her inability to find meaning in anything except outward appearances. She forgives her mother for her inability to feel compassion especially now as emptiness and insignificance permeate her entire history and being. The narrator-writer of "Carta" is greater than her mother or her father because she is thoughtful, compassionate, loving and forgiving.

The childhood home functions as a symbol of a home devoid of love, compassion and forgiveness. The daughters' voices are linked due to the anguish and rejection of the childhood home and all it represented but in "Carta" the result is different than in *El mismo mar*. As Elia states, her mother not only disliked the house, but she tried to change it *and her daughter*:

A la diosa rubia de las manos blancas, digo, no le gustó nunca esta casa oscura, destartalada, vieja, demasiado grande, llena de recovecos y resistencias irritantes. Intentó siempre imponernos- a este piso y a mí- sus ideas del orden, la luminosidad y la belleza... A la señora le gustaba lo nuevo, lo ultimísimo, lo rutilante, tan poco europea en esto, tan de nuestra ciudad. (*El mismo mar* 23)

As she states, her mother always tried to impose her ideas of order and beauty on the disheveled Catalan home and on the disheveled Catalan Elia. Neither lived up to the requirements of appearances for society's sake. This points out the true problem in the mother-daughter relationship: different expectations. Much like the apartment in Barcelona, Elia is never able to live up to the expectations of her "blond goddess" (mother). Likewise, for the mother in "Carta a la madre," the dark and gloomy downtown apartment was traded for an "absurd" (in the words of the narrator) home in a more bourgeois residential neighborhood (77). For both narrators, the childhood home connects them to their past and serves to point out the different perspectives they have about what a home really ought to be in contrast to the *suitable* house that was pursued by the mother. The image of house (a new place

but devoid of love and commitment) held even less interest for the daughter than the imagined memory of a childhood home that the daughter, no matter how old, hoped for.

The inclusion of similar narrators/daughter figures, mother figures and father figures helps to create a sense of continuity between *El mismo mar* and “Carta a la madre” but even more importantly, as readers feel they already know the characters, family structure and social setting, they recognize difference as well. Tusquets chooses to reintroduce these very similar characters in a new work to find the closure and acceptance of a childhood devoid of love and compassion that was missing in *El mismo mar*. The reappearance of characters (especially the father figure) and the reintroduction of the childhood home as an ideal space serve to underline Tusquets’ criticism of ostentation of the upper-middle class in post-war Barcelona and the emptiness of household that hold appearances as more important than loving relationships.

The father’s lack of power and indifference to different perspectives or even changes to the household set the stage for the complex relationship between the narrators in each work and their mothers. In both works, these complex relationships rely on a childhood space that does not allow for compassion, self-actualization or love.



#### **Chapter 4: Finding forgiveness in the mother-daughter relationship**

Tusquets' depiction of a beautiful, goddess-like yet threatening and unloving mother works to create a mix of feelings that range from admiration to anger and disbelief. Her narrators expose a situation that is anything but ideal yet the situation is portrayed as an archetype, one that repeats and is relived time and time again. The representation of the attractive and monstrous (but compassionless) mother and the ensuing mother-daughter relationship works as the main thread to tie together Tusquets' two works together. Both works contain a strikingly similar mother figure, physically and emotionally. Analyzing their similarities in character and in their relationships allows readers a sense of continuity between the two works yet they are entirely different. Ultimately, this continuation provides the platform for forgiveness and closure for the daughter figure, freeing her from the shackles of her childhood, which was not possible in *El mismo mar*.

Physically, the mothers of *El mismo mar* and "Carta a la madre" could be twins. Both are strikingly beautiful and noticed for their "foreign" appearance. As Elia notes in *El mismo mar*, her mother is like a foreigner in her own native city: "La diosa rubia y riente del primer piso, tan pecaminosamente extranjera en su propia ciudad" (11). Neither mother conforms to the Spanish appearance of their native city, Barcelona, and her beauty is appealing because it is considered superior since it is *northern* and not *southern*. Additionally, the mother figure in these two works does not fit comfortably into the Hispanic culture: "tan poca hispana y tan poca religiosa"

(“Carta a la madre” 85) as this woman is all appearances without much connection to a spiritual element that could make her more compassionate or caring. Her attractiveness goes no further than her physical appearance. Her lack of religious practice in the broadest sense sets her apart from other mothers who might be capable of affection.

The mother’s blond hair and blue eyes are constantly a topic of obsession for her daughter since her Nordic beauty is what connects her to the “other,” to the “desirable” and distances her from a spiritual or love connection to any other human being. The narrator of “Carta a la madre” explains how her mother was the epitome of beauty, claiming she was the blondest, tallest and had the lightest eyes (78) but she is also “foreign” and an “unknown” entity since she is empty of spirit. The mother’s *foreign* appearance is one of the many characteristics that differentiate her from other Hispanic, Catalonian mothers. Her differences serve as the basis of the fractured relationship with her daughter because her own emptiness characterizes the relationship that she imposes on her daughter. The mother’s world is filled only on the surface with household goods, apartments, new clothes and meaningless conversations with men who admire her beauty. The daughter’s world is likewise filled with these objects since her family’s world is devoid of compassion and love.

Both mother figures possess a strong sense of style and value their extravagant appearance in an effort to exhibit physical beauty, foreign appearance and social status. The mother’s appearance is another characteristic that sets her apart from the other, more common mothers who, in contrast, might focus on the self-actualization

of daughters or the emotional needs of the family. As Elia describes, her mother had an air of self confidence and arrogance that allowed her to successfully wear extravagant outfits without looking like she tried too hard: “En unas ropas que en otra mujer pudieran parecer extravagancia pero que dan en ella la justa medida de una distinción perfecta” (9). Outwardly, then, the mother figure fit the role of a model... not a model mother but a model, an objectification of a woman whose essence of motherhood had been surreptitiously removed. Additionally, Elia mentions her mother’s plethora of expensive clothes and jewelry. She had many “batas de terciopelo,” “zapatillas de plata u oro,” and “babuchas carmesí bordadas asimismo en oro y plata” (73-74). The accouterments of an expensive lifestyle and wardrobe are like the baubles that shine but provide no warmth.

Similarly, in “Carta a la madre,” the narrator notes how the dressmakers and tailors adored her mother and paid special attention to her (90). She even mentions how the daughter of the dressmaker recognized her in an airport because she remembered her mother. The description reminds readers of a fashion star who is memorable because of her figure and the way she carries herself. The narrator-writer had no recollection of who this stranger was but it is pertinent that she told of this event because it epitomizes the relationship between the narrator-writer and her mother: strangers thought they “knew” her mother even though she was never able to “know” her mother except as they did—as a model, a shell of a woman, a false pretense of womanhood.

To be fair, the mother figure's views on appearance were not only limited to herself and in both works it is clear that she intended to impose her lifestyle—if not her wardrobe-- on her daughter. In *El mismo mar*, Elia reflects on the constant battle with her mother about her appearance: “Mi madre... agitándose veloz en la penumbra, para explicarme lo mal que había dormido, las reformas que proyectaba en el piso, los espantoso que podía resultar que una hija como yo... se marchara de viaje sin pasar antes por la modista” (71). Her mother could not imagine how any daughter of hers would leave for a trip without going to the dressmaker first. The mother figure expected her daughter to inherit her preference for societal appearances, at the very least. There was no room for difference, for self-actualization or for depth of personality or character. The expectation was to perpetuate appearance and materiality without regard to individual identity or preference.

In both works, the mother figure's appearance and values about appearance again contribute to the strained relationship with the daughter figure. Neither daughter is ever able to meet the expectations of their mothers because, as the narrator of “Carta a la madre” claims, no one could do anything better than her mother. There was never a space to outperform the monster goddess. She would not have permitted that. “En el limitado mundo de mi infancia imperaba pues la convicción de que todo cuanto hacías... lo hacías mejor que nadie” (85). The daughter is unable to meet her mother's expectations of beauty and style in part because the expectations have no other grounding than that perfection can only be

one: the mother figure. This attitude causes additional stress on the relationship from the perspective of the narrating daughter.

Both narrators elevate the mother to goddess-like status in their description because that is the role they, as daughters, are expected to take in regard to their mother. Elia, in *El mismo mar*, actually refers to her mother as a goddess: “Mi madre no pasea propiamente por el mundo un orgullo de casta sino una altivez de diosa” (9). As Elia claims, her mother’s beauty and haughtiness separate her from normal humans. The narrative ambiguity of false praise, based on the rules dictated by the situation, allows readers to know the resentment the daughter feels while still being incapable of coming out to reject entirely her mother’s haughtiness and vanity.

Being part of a higher social class alone was insufficient; she had the pride of a goddess. Similarly, in “Carta a la madre,” the mother is referred to as a princess (80). Given the situation, the irony is not lost on readers. While she is described as having a court of admirers who seemed to revere her unconditionally: “Rodeada... por una devota corte de admiradores incondicionales, dispuestos a reír tus salidas y a ignorar tus excesos” (79), this haughty woman has none of the characteristics of a “mother.” She is mother in name and biology only, not in spirit since she expresses no commitment to the self-actualization of her offspring or to the nurturing environment of a healthy home. Both narrators describe their mothers as above-normal human beings but they cannot consider them as nurturing mothers.

The elevation of the mother to goddess-like stature is, therefore, two sided. The mother figure is beautiful on the surface and frightening for lack of internal

integrity. As Elia states, she is capable of turning into an ugly, admonishing harpy without endearing qualities, though she may be pleasing to the eye: “una diosa capaz de convertirse en una arpía” (173). She does not know how to classify her as a “nurturing mother” and struggles to comprehend her desire to please her in order to receive the love she wants yet her desire to please only increases her hate for her. “Tal vez por eso yo no haya podido asumir nunca una imagen arquetípica normal, tan tranquilizadora para una misma: madre envidiosa y agresiva o/y clemente madre bondadosa” (*El mismo mar* 151).

This dichotomy between the appealing outer image of the gorgeous woman who wears, uncomfortably, the title of mother and the ideal image of a nurturing mother as the daughter hopes to find within this woman is also the focus of the letter in “Carta a la madre.” The daughter spends her time attempting to explain how she understands and accepts the division of opposite feelings she feels in regards to her *mother*. While in *El mismo mar*, Elia was just beginning to discover her feelings and developing an understanding of the appearance and reality of the mother image, she is not able to process these images as realities to find closure like the narrator-writer of “Carta.”

The mother figure in Tusquets’ work can be categorized as a Medusa figure. Concha Alborg explains the Medusa archetype in women’s literature: “La madre en el papel de Medusa es una metáfora para la madre admirada como una diosa, pero que es controladora, que está en conflicto con su hija quien no quiere verse reflejada en el retrato monstruoso de su madre” (14). As she explains, the mother is admired but

ultimately is controlling and in conflict with her daughter who cannot escape the effects of her control. This describes, in part, both mother-daughter relationships in Tusquets' works. Neither narrator-daughter escapes the control or the damage of a dualistic image in which control of appearance prevails over nurturing engagement of self-actualization.

Alborg argues that the Medusa character represents the daughter's hatred of the mother (14). Ultimately, Alborg theorizes that the daughter needs to find acceptance and independence in order to mature and move on: "Veremos que las hijas... casi siempre expresan ambivalencia para las madres; por un lado desean su cariño, pero a la vez necesitan su independencia separadas de la madre para madurar" (15). The daughter's challenge of maturing and finding acceptance is the purpose for Tusquets' work "Carta a la madre." The maturity and acceptance is not of a mother who was "good enough" but rather of a mother who was exceptional on the surface as a woman but incomplete and problematic as a mother. Her ability to "nurture" was only an ability to serve as a model. Her ability to "mother" was inhibited by her inability to love others. Once the daughter-narrator-writer can accept this aspect of her childhood, she can rise above the situation to forgive and perhaps even to have compassion (if not pity) for the woman who birthed her.

While *El mismo mar* serves as a discovery of the fractured relationship and a continued but arduous search for what the daughter will never receive from her mother, "Carta a la madre" functions as the continued journey to acceptance and a step that allows a space for the daughter take action in letter form. Hence, tracing the

mother-daughter relationship from *El mismo mar* through “Carta a la madre” takes readers on the narrator’s journey from idolization and hatred to forgiveness and compassion. While following their relationship, it is easy to understand the dichotomy of adoration and hate that exist in the daughter’s view of the mother figure as well as the forgiveness of the woman for not measuring up to the daughter’s idealized notion of what motherhood might mean beyond the stereotypes that culture provides.

Analysis of these two works show how a woman who is perceived by a child as superhuman and superior to all others can ultimately be humanized as a woman whose very personality, interests and social constraints could not allow for her own self-actualization as a mother. The adoration of the ideal is evident in the description in “Carta a la madre” as the narrator describes her mother as being the wittiest and most inventive: “la más brillante, la más ocurrente, la más ingeniosa” (79) but she is no better at nurturing or loving than the archetypal character of the mother in *El mismo mar*. Even though the narrator-writer explains that her mother had read more books than anyone she knew and was the best at everything she did (82, 85), she was still incapable of the compassion and love that the daughter required for acceptance in the family as an equal, as a woman, as a self-actualized daughter. In “Carta”, the daughter accepts her mother’s failings and is able to move on. This is not the case in *El mismo mar*.

The narrator of *El mismo mar* also possesses a certain level of admiration for her mother, although it is always veiled in criticism. Elia describes her mother as a



real woman, an “auténtica señora” as Catalanian society would dictate (169). Also, Elia compliments her mother while criticizing her at the same time: “Una madre desinhibida, juguetona, voluntariosa y terca, mucho más bella y mucho más distante que todas las estatuas, una madre que nunca ha necesitado refugiarse en viejas catedrales” (8). The duality of her description of her mother as more distant than a statue points to the fracture in her relationship with this “Medusa”-like mother who has no compassion, no ability to love others. She is uninhibited and playful while being selfish and opinionated. She is beautiful but distant and isolationist. Later, she describes her as beautiful, threatening and haughty (11-12). The mother figure is incapable of a nurturing relationship with her daughter and for this reason there is a divide between what is desired and the daughter receives, what is sought in the mother-daughter relationship and what can be attained. The relationship is complex because there are few acceptable commonalities.

Even though there exists a level of adoration for the mother, there is a longing for a more traditional, nurturing mother figure in both works. In “Carta a la madre,” the narrator-writer reveals the duality of her feelings for her mother. While she adores her as a beautiful and intelligent woman, she also wishes for someone more conventional, someone who can nurture and love her as she is, as the person she has determined to become:

Cierto que en algunos momentos hubiera preferido una madre corriente, más convencional, que me diera a veces unos buenos

cachetes... una madre que suspendiera en nuestro caso todo juicio crítico y nos considerara extraordinarios, que nos comiera a besos. (90)

The mother the letter-writer might have preferred is one who would not have been indifferent and who would have loved her children in spite of all things, who would have smothered her children in kisses no matter who they were or who they had become.

Similarly, Elia describes a mother “con sus labios distantes que besaban tan poco” (74) and she yearns for the emotional, caring, interested mother who doted on her children. Neither narrator is able to form a bond with their mother that most daughters do because the mothers in this case prefer distance. The result is the hatred that flows beneath the surface of the adoration and the sarcasm of the text.

The tone of admiration is quickly perceived as disdain in *El mismo mar*. Nearly every compliment of the mother by Elia also functions as criticism. As Elia recounts the many formative and scarring events of her childhood and adolescence, she explores how her mother’s actions affected her. She recalls constantly battling her mother who seemed all powerful and omnipresent: “Batallar desesperado, mi tumultuoso pataleo báquico por escapar a su influencia olímpica y omnipresente” (73). As she recalls, her mother was able to cause terror in just her glance alone:

Y cuando pienso en la madre de mi infancia, con sus ojos azules que podían realmente y sin metáfora despedir rayos de fuego, o tal vez

fríos rayos de hielo, que te dejaban en ambas posibilidades fulminada, bien clavada en tu silla con el terror en el pecho, mi madre con sus palabras medidas, razonables, tan justas que no admitan replica.” (74)

The mother’s control in her childhood caused fear in Elia because of her harsh character and inability to live up to her mother’s standards; however, it still indicated the mother’s involvement in her life, no matter how negative. Later, as she narrates her disastrous affair with Jorge, she explained how her mother had lost the will to fight her anymore. Her mother had slowly withdrawn and become emotionally absent, like Elia’s father: “Ella ha perdido con los años las ganas de batallar conmigo- si obedecerá todo a innata ordinariiez, heredada posiblemente de mi padre” (75). The mother stopped fighting and caring whether her daughter was different by distancing herself from her.

In *El mismo mar*, Elia’s main grievance was that she felt abandoned by her mother and Guiomar: “Todo me resulta demasiado tonto, inmensamente vacío, hasta el abandono de mi madre y Guiomar” (53). The abandonment by her mother causes a tremendous aching in Elia’s adult life. Her hatred and disdain for her mother is a direct result of the abandonment she felt from childhood that continued into her adult life. While Mirella Servodidio explains how Elia’s problems with her mother were caused in childhood in psychoanalytic terms: “the originating difficulties of this relationship are grounded in a pre-Oedipal phase bereft of the symbiotic bonding and the unclouded specularity that psychoanalytical theoreticians view as the determinants of female identity” (158), the essence of the dysfunction is that they are

incapable of forming a substantial bond that will also allow each to maintain a personal identity that is acceptable to the other. Elia is never able to bring closure to the relationship in *El mismo mar*. Servodidio explains that the narrative voice of Elia is “destined to the circular reenactment of a drama of non-reciprocal bonding. Without the resolution of the deep, regressive need for fusion with her mother, her journey towards individuation has, in fact, never really begun” (159-160).

While the narrator in *El mismo mar* is unable to fulfill her journey, Tusquets’ decision to create an extremely similar mother and daughter figures in “Carta a la madre” and the space that will allow the journey towards individuation to be completed, is significant. “Carta a la madre” helps both the narrator and the readers understand what caused the abandonment by the mother and the reciprocal abandonment by the daughter who learned to hate what she could not love. Similar to *El mismo mar*, the narrator of “Carta a la madre” explains her extreme disdain for her mother in a comparable manner but reflection leads to recognition and acceptance of the inability of both to connect. The narrator notes how something suddenly changed in her childhood. Instead of love and admiration, the narrator-writer explains while at times she only felt disgust but she cannot distinguish if she actually stopped loving her mother or not. She cannot identify the exact moment when their relationship was no longer viable: “No sé a qué edad dejé de quererte, no sé si he dejado de quererte nunca. No sé en qué preciso momento algo se echó a perder en nuestra relación” (91). By examining her past and the vanishing of love for her mother, she can put their relationship into perspective.

As she explains to her mother in her letter, there was not a specific action by the mother or words from the mother that caused this division or the breakdown in the relationship. Simply, the narrator finally understood the feelings of abandonment were because she would never fulfill her mother's expectations as her mother's expectations had very little to do with "her" and the person she had become. She would never earn her mother's approbation because her mother was incapable of offering it to her:

Pero si nuestra relación se quebró, si en algún momento de la adolescencia me enfrenté a ti y no bajé durante tantos años la guardia, no fue por nada que me dijeras, me hicieras, me dejaras de hacer, por nada que dijeras, o hicieras, o dejaras de hacer a otros. Fue porque comprendí- en una súbita revelación que debía de haber madurado largo tiempo en secreto en mi interior- que nunca... lograría tu aprobación. (91)

The narrator finally came to an understanding of what the underlying issues with her mother were. She realized, and accepted that she would never be as beautiful, intelligent or fashionable as her mother wanted her to be and that she would never fulfill her hopes and, most importantly, now that she realized that it was impossible, she no longer needed to long for her approbation.

The mother had imagined a life for her daughter based on her own standards and ideals. Her view of her daughter never changed as her daughter grew, resulting in an increasingly strained relationship. The narrator explains that even if she were a

master of her field, if she were to exceed her mother and all others in every way, she still would not gain her mother's approval:

Aunque llegara a superar tu crol y a ser campeona de natación, aunque escribiera mejor que Cervantes y pintara mejor que Rembrandt, aunque consagrara la vida entera a conformar la imagen que tú habías fantaseado de mí, no iba a conseguir jamás tu aprobación. (92)

The mother could never be happy with her daughter's self-actualization because she was incapable of loving, of nurturing, of providing approbation, and this is the ultimate realization of "Carta a la madre." Her mother was incapable of finding satisfaction with herself or any other human being, "tampoco nunca ibas a permitir que te hiciéramos feliz" (92).

In the end, this conclusion helps bring closure for the daughter figure in regards to her mother. What started out as a search for discovery in *El mismo mar* ends in closure and acceptance in "Carta a la madre." The narrator explains that all of the problems of the past are no longer important anymore and that she has reached her own sense of peace and is no longer controlled by the need for acceptance and approbation. She is comfortable with the woman she is and the pain and suffering of the past no longer hold her hostage in terms of her self-actualization. "He descubierto que los agravios y las agresiones, si existieron, han dejado hace mucho de importarme...que la historia se ha cerrado, ha concluido, que ha bajado definitivamente el telón y estamos definitivamente en paz" (92-93). The drama between them no longer matters since the curtain has fallen and there is peace.

“Carta a la madre” does what *El mismo mar* cannot: the narrator-writer can find forgiveness and can distance herself from constant suffering and self-deprecation to find self-worth in understanding a difficult situation. Tusquets’ decision to reintroduce variations of the mother and daughter from *El mismo mar* gives the story a sense of continuity and closure. The two works are linked by the mother-daughter relationship and by the archetypal characters that serve to universalize the struggle in the mother-daughter relationship. Elia is destined to explore the cyclical nature of *El mismo mar* and the cyclical suffering of those who refuse to give up the ideals that determine others without consideration or love. Like the sea and the tides, when cyclical suffering and self-deprecation are always present without awareness or space for self-actualization, frustratingly, nothing changes. “Carta a la madre” differs because the narrator-writer takes action and determines identity by distancing herself from the situation and confronting her own past. The letter is written to address the mother directly with the narrator’s emotions in a truthful and cathartic manner. The catharsis of the narrator allows her to explain her feelings and understand them herself. There is room for resolution because the character has grown and found understanding and acceptance of the fact that suffering cannot eliminate culpability or even lead necessarily beyond itself. What was impossible for Elia is made possible for the narrator in “Carta” because to move beyond suffering there must also be recognition of the realities of the situation and acceptance of the situation that is unchanged.

*El mismo mar* functions as a journey toward self-discovery for Elia that is never fulfilled. Tusquets' "Carta a la madre" enables the Elia-like narrator to break from the cyclical relationship of disdain and find forgiveness for the mother and acceptance for herself.



## Conclusion

Esther Tusquets' two works *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* and "Carta a la madre" are linked because of the many similarities they share. Tusquets' decision to continue the mother-daughter story in "Carta a la madre" provides the narrator-writer with a space for self-actualization and readers with the opportunity for closure that was never possible in the novel *El mismo mar*, published decades earlier. The letter format is especially effective in expressing the emotions of the narrator turned author because as author her voice has power and direction. It is only through the catharsis of letter writing that the narrator is able to recognize her own self-actualization, synthesize her relationship with her mother, understand it, accept it, and move past it with a voice and purpose of her own.

Tusquets' portrayal of a daughter searching for self-actualization resonates across cultures and is universal in theme. While Tusquets' initial novel demonstrates the pitfalls and stagnation for those who are unable to create a space for self-actualization or who cannot find closure and forgiveness in regards to their mother, in "Carta" she creates the space also gives readers an example of a woman who has taken action and forgiven in "Carta."

The universal theme of forgiveness is two-fold. On one hand, the narrator-writer is able to forgive her mother for never loving her father and understands that her mother never understood how to love anyone beyond herself. On the other hand, the narrator is able to finally forgive herself. The protagonist-author explains that she

has spent the majority of her life battling her mother, dwelling on their relationship and obsessing over her own shortcomings and now, in her midlife, she sees her mother for the fragile person she was and can accept her failures. At the end of “Carta,” the narrator is able to be “at peace” because she has forgiven herself and her mother. The narrator-protagonist recognized that by perpetuating the hate, she was also incapable of loving fully. Forgiveness provides the space for loving self.

*El mismo mar* and “Carta” demonstrate that relationships between mothers and daughters are often complex and cause suffering which leads to hate and stagnation in terms of self-actualization. Tusquets’ psychological portrayals and the solution that she identifies in “Carta” provide a model for self-actualization that readers can understand. The contribution of an analysis of “Carta” in relation to *El mismo mar* is that Tusquets reveals that taking action to forgive is the clearest avenue toward self-actualization. This is an important social message that was timely and pertinent but not “possible” decades earlier in the fictional representation of Catalanian culture represented in *El mismo mar*.

While Tusquets rejected the notion that she was a feminist writer, the journey of the protagonist in her works demonstrates how a woman can move beyond the stagnation within a culture that does not provide sufficient space for self-actualization. Narrative distance from inner thoughts and the choice for an active discourse that creates an implied dialog in which the implied reader does not respond, is her fictional model for demonstrating how forgiveness can generate a space for change. The contribution of this thesis then, is that the analysis of “Carta” outlines

and proves that Tusquets was aware of the power of self-actualization that can be orchestrated by moving from the inner-thoughts of a narrative like the one analyzed in *El mismo mar* (in which the protagonist stagnates) to the role of the author who takes action by writing and choosing a new destiny. This destiny is one of her own choosing, one that recognizes past, forgives what must be forgiven and allows the space for acceptance of self because the transgressions of the past are simply part of the fragile past that no longer has power over the present.

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