

Rosario Castellanos' short stories: characters and the significant moment

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— *Abstract*—

This article offers a view on different short-story books written by the Mexican author Rosario Castellanos. It uses the general structure of the story as a guideline, primarily focused on the author's personal definition. Having adopted such a perspective, I shall focus on the characters although the situation, the environment, and the main topic flow peculiarly. Said manner conforms to the social, psychological, and ideological concerns of the author who can describe them extremely accurately thanks to the use of certain techniques embedded in the genre. The aim is then, to define and establish the mechanism through which the construction of the "significant moment", within which both characters and actions converge as the central element of the story.

Keywords:

Rosario Castellanos; short story; characters; significant moment.

Rosario Castellanos' short stories (1925-1974) are an aesthetic exercise determined by the realization and significant value of the described event. In the rather rare interviews, the questions about her storybooks are considerably less than those asked about her poetry or novel. Emmanuel Carballo dedicates only one question to the topic, "What differences do you find between a short story and a novel?", To which the author responds.

The story seems to be more difficult because it is specified to describe a single moment. That moment must be significant enough to be worth capturing. In opposition, the novel is capable of enriching itself with a multitude of details. The creatures' features that do not necessarily condition the action or the meaning of the novel can be mentioned. In the story, this opportunity has no place. There is not as much space. It is necessary to reduce facts and people to essential features. (Castellanos, 1986, pp. 530-31).

From the opposition, raised by the author, between the story and the novel, other traits attributed to the story are inferred: each character trait, necessarily, conditions the action or the meaning of the story; the character and the event are reduced to their essential features. Rosario Castellanos' concept coincides with the most current theoretical descriptions:

the literary tale (the text) is undoubtedly a kind of short narrative message, elaborated with the very specific intention (by the author) of generating a momentary and shocking effect or impression on the recipient (the reader) and whose linguistic composition seems restricted by the targeting choice of a single topic (a fact, a field or a character, according to Balza), narrated from a series of unique macro propositions [...], not semantically linked to any other adherent or coexisting narrative text, which, in turn, it covers it with a relative semantic and formal autonomy. This means that all narrative text postulated as a story, after being elaborated in its final version, must be unique and that its sequences are organized within a closed semantic space, which implies as necessary a resolution that does not go beyond its significant sphere. (Barrera, 1997, pp. 33-34)

This definition focused on the generation of an impressive effect or impression from a chosen theme; both elements would be the result of a selection developed through characters and actions that represent in a way the chosen theme and an organization of events directed at a specific moment that, in Castellanos' definition, is a significant moment. This moment is not, then, about a climactic moment or a surprising turn—as suggested by other story poets—but rather a moment with relevant or peculiar meaning, either for the narrator, the character, or the reader. The expression corresponds to what

has also been called "moment of epiphany" or revelation, as it will be named at times during the analysis and commentary of the stories.

The awareness of this difficulty in recreating the significant moment leads Castellanos to precision and forcefulness in her stories, to the most precise dramatic structure. The brevity of the genre provides her stories with the exact measurements for suspense, surprise, the exposition of ideas transferred to actions and characters. In addition, it is a type of prose in which the author's recognized humor emerges more prominently than the rest of her texts: cruel, pessimistic, and gloomy, in combination with a wide range of emotions, feelings, and concerns. The achievement in the recreation of spaces, in the construction of deep characters, without stereotypes or Manichaeism, in the design of just structures, without loose ends, although with the necessary ambiguity for the reader to fill in the information gaps and participate in the creation of the drama, are some of the elements that make this storyteller a privileged episode in the history of the Mexican tale and, of course, of the work of Rosario Castellanos. A good part of these successes and the achievement of the demands of the genre is based on the characterization of the characters, the element around which the other elements of the story revolve, and on which the following pages will focus.

Ciudad Real, the name that received a portion of the Chiapas territory¹ during a few years of the New Spain era, is the title of the first book of stories published by the author, in 1960—an ironic title: it characterizes the space of the stories by pointing out their anachronism and alleged ancestry—, three years after *Balún Canán* and more than ten years after her first books of poetry and essays. The story was, then, a late genre in the vast work of the Mexican writer, who, by then, has acquired skill in handling the structures of various genres in prose and verse. The first two stories still maintain clear links with indigenism²: the theme centered on the character of the indigenous, sometimes recreated as a collective character - verbally constructed through “the use of common plural nouns and collective nouns, as well as the scarcity of characters with their own names” (from Juan Bolufer, 2000, p. 288) -. Castellanos resorts to this collective character in the

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- 1 “Ciudad Real exists, or rather it existed. When in the 16th century the Spanish took over the indigenous settlement called Jehen, in the current Mexican state of Chiapas, they gave it the name of Villa Real de Chiapa. Soon after, the name was changed to Ciudad Real, and much later to San Cristóbal, to which “de Las Casas” was later added in homage to Fray Bartolomé. It was the capital of the state of Chiapas until the mid-nineteenth century.” (Peter Standish, *Hacia Rosario Castellanos por medio del análisis de uno de sus cuentos*”, in Cervantes Virtual Library, online: https://cvc.cervantes.es/ensenanza/biblioteca_ele/aepe/pdf/congreso_49/congreso_49_41.pdf (consultation: 11/20/20)
 - 2 Indigenism acquired relevance in the Hispanic American narrative of the first half of the 20th century, with a series of characteristics in common, such as the rural geographical environment and themes like the lives of marginalized and exploited ethnic groups, “it’s about reflecting their traditions, cus-

first story of this book: the Bolometric community, in “La muerte del tigre” which points out the conditions of ethnic groups, particularly in the state of Chiapas: displacement, slavery, misery, and gradual extinction. It is also a story about the role of urban space, the Ciudad Real, in the destruction of that sector of the population. The effect of the collective character is projected in the construction of the group’s identity through centuries and shared individual concerns.

This type of character remains, partially, in “La tregua”, whose anecdote focuses on another of the characteristics of indigenous literature: the detailed description of their beliefs, superstitions, customs, and rituals, the contrast with the Caxtlan, a white man, the devastating effects attributed to the *pukuj*, a kind of ominous indigenous spirit similar to the nahual, the consumption of posh brandy, as a measure of Creole control over the indigenous community. On the other hand, the following stories already present individual characters, the transformation of initial situations, external and internal conflicts, and not only the denunciation of the conditions to which Creoles and mestizos had confined the indigenous people but also the errors that lead the character to his physical-moral destruction.

The indigenous question, throughout these types of stories, is recreated from different perspectives, in addition to that of the indigenous, mestizos, Creoles, and even foreigners³ parade through this volume. The structure of the story allows—and determines—the treatment of the character as a character in action and as a problem; and not only that of the female character, as some critics insist. From the indigenous people, Rosario Castellanos analyzes—now through a third-person narrator focused on actions and thoughts—the depth of her consciousness: the constant uncertainty, the dehumanizing misery, the normalization of abuse—both as a victim and victimizer—: in short, the complexity of the thought and behavior of this individual who is continually reduced to animalization. The Creole character is characterized as a type of individual infantilized by the force of the memory of violent

toms, ways of life, and the socio-economic and cultural situation”, particularly the Indian in contrast to the generally Creole, white, religious and capitalist systems: “There is, as the generating core of the plot, a confrontation between two cultures and ways of conceiving life and social relations: one primitive, peaceful and resigned, the indigenous, and the other violent, exploitative [...] Concerning narrative techniques, they are stories of an omniscient narrator [...]. Aesthetically, certain techniques of Naturalism are evident.” (Demetrio Estébanez Calderón, *Diccionario de términos literarias*, Madrid, Alianza, 2001, pp. 564-566).

- 3 "In this book, it is possible to draw up an inventory of the elements that constitute one of the sectors of Mexico's national reality: that in which the descendants of the defeated natives coexist with the descendants of the European conquerors. If the former has lost the memory of their greatness, the others have lost the attributes of their strength, and the decadence in which they all struggle is total. In the daily treatment of such dissimilar beings, phenomena and situations occur that began to interest anthropologists and that have never ceased to tempt writers who strive to reach the ultimate root of these extreme forms of human misery" (Castellanos, 2005, p. 222).

ancestors whose ancestry is sustained by colonization and exploitation; the Creole heir, even in decline, is incapable of recognizing the system of privileges that have been achieved thanks to the usufruct of the indigenous; it has naturalized violence so much that he is not even aware of his abuses: always in fear of being victimized, they cling to the role of victimizers, such as Don Agustín, Héctor Villafuerte, Niña Nides. The indigenous “outsiders” —those taken from childhood to serve in Creole houses—, such as “Modesta Gómez”, those who have already assimilated to the urban center of Ciudad Real have ended up assuming their role in the exploitation system in which they are allowed to mistreat their peers, in exchange for the minimum privilege of living from their work, those women who violently deprive the indigenous women of the merchandise they intend to sell in the city.

Mestizos or migrants tend to collapse before this chaotic scenario, in a type of story that is particularly interesting because it brings together different visions of the other, recreated in socio-ethnic groups, such as “The wheel of the hungry”: the characters are characterized in such a way that their behaviors cause strangeness to each other or the reader. The improvised nurse, Alicia Mendoza, from Oaxaca who moves to Ciudad Real, has her first contact with the divisions through a boy who carries his suitcase to a hotel and observes that he hits an indigenous man, without any reason and with the reassurance that there will be no consequence: “Am I indigenous to be compared?” (Castellanos, 2005, p. 72); Later, he will learn about the practice of the “coletos”, the Creoles, who increased their prices to humanitarian groups —such as La Misión, for which Alicia will work—, who favor the indigenous. This strangeness is even found in the characters who have already settled in the region, as the administrator of the association that has hired her makes her see: “what happens here is so different [...] You will have to learn one thing from the indigenous people: that time is of no importance” (Castellanos, 2005, p. 75).

When the nurse finally reaches the indigenous community, she discovers that the character of Dr. Salazar is even stranger than the others: disenchanted, cynical, indolent, and, at the same time, still concerned about the health of the community. It is during an attempt to vaccinate the Indians that the origin of the doctor and the nurse is known: “since we arrived, the interpreter [went from house to house and explained to them that [...] we are not going to exploit them, like the others ladinos]”(Castellanos, 2005, p. 83). Both observe the behavior of the few patients who come to the clinic, to conclude that their altruistic intentions crash against the wall of misery and ignorance. The final revelations that the characters of the nurse and doctor have, point to some possibility of improvement, resignation, or insanity, respectively:

Suddenly Salazar came over and took Alicia by the shoulders.

"What do you think is worth more?" The life of that little boy or that of all the others? Kuleg will tell you what happened. We gave him a lesson and what a lesson! Now the Indians will have learned that you do not play with the Oxchuc clinic. They will start to come, oh yes! And with the money ahead. We can buy medicines, lots of medicines...

Salazar was gesturing. Alicia stepped away from him and when she finished putting away her clothes, she closed the suitcase. It was raining outside. (Castellanos, 2005, p. 90).

The characters have reached their conclusions, and with them, the story, consistent with the tone and atmosphere of the text, and the rhythm of the sentences is accelerated by brevity and punctuation, following the genre's didactics (Lapido, 2020, pp. 331-343). The characters have shown an evolution: Alicia loses all expectations of a provincial single woman, but perhaps she will not abandon Oxchuc or the doctor because of the rain, and perhaps Salazar is right, and her measure will have a positive effect. That minimal opening is just a possibility in the future, while the events narrated end in cruel epiphany. In this same tone and theme, the character of the anthropologist José Antonio Romero is located, in "El don rechazado", who manages to partially "redeem" a small family that he intends to take care of to recognize that the indigenous people do not even understand the sense of unconditional support.

Ciudad real ends with the story "Arthur Smith salva su alma": the last look at the indigenous world, that of the foreigner who, at the opposite extreme of the indigenous idiosyncrasy, ends up recognizing the contradictions of the US humanitarian aid system itself -The Mission is mentioned, sponsored by the evangelical church-. At the beginning of the story, the religious community is marginalized from the indigenous one: the indigenous people are not part of the North American community and they do not fully understand the new religious doctrine, which sets them apart from the Catholic community. In the eyes of Arthur Smith, the deficiencies of the Organization begin to emerge: they do not intervene with improvement actions; until he learns that his assistant, Mariano Santiz Nich, was killed with machetes due to religious differences. This event determines a revelation for him:

Arthur realized, at last, that it was not a number in the statistics who had died, not a native in exotic costume and customs, not a subject that could be pressed on with a highly perfected propaganda device. That the one who had died was a man, with doubts like him, with useless rebellions, with memories, with irreparable absences, with a hope stronger than all common sense. (Castellanos, 2005, p. 123)

This revelation leads Arthur to another series of revelations about the supposed help of the Americans: the work of limiting the communist advance. Finally, he decides to break with the Organization, even if that means renouncing his privileged situation; in return, he identifies with the indigenous: "It will be a matter of reaching an agreement, at least these men and I speak the same language" (Castellanos, 2005, p. 128).

Thus, Castellanos seems to insinuate that consciousness is a human and collective state incapable of arising at the extremes of social inequality: neither Creoles nor indigenous people are capable of a moral or physical revelation, and they will remain condemned to the defects that their extremes impose.

In this book, it is possible to draw up an inventory of the elements that constitute one of the sectors of Mexico's national reality: that in which the descendants of the defeated natives coexist with the descendants of the European conquerors. If the former has lost the memory of their greatness, the others have lost the attributes of their strength, and the decadence in which they all struggle is total. In the daily treatment of such dissimilar beings, phenomena and situations occur that began to interest anthropologists and that have never ceased to tempt writers who strive to reach the ultimate root of these extreme forms of human misery (Castellanos, 2016, p. 993).

Revelations are only possible for those in the middle, although they will be painful and even destructive.

For *Los convidados de agosto*, 1964 -in which, she confesses, exhausts the "vein of provincial and archaic life that was so rich to me" (Castellanos, 2016, p. 993) - the author will deal mainly with the Creole Chiapaneco character: the conflicts and miseries of this social group must have been very close to the author. Due to economic conditions, the character enjoys greater freedom of action and this favors the dynamics of the story as a narrative structure: unexpected turns, increased tension depending on the character's decisions. The heterodiegetic narrator predominates, focused mainly on the female protagonist character, with whom the speeches about the "woman's problem" are reduced to certain reflections that are difficult to attribute to the narrator or the character - "The word young lady is an honorable title... up to a certain age. Later, she begins to speak out with doubtful or mocking hesitations and to be listened to with a hidden and painful humiliation" (Castellanos, 2005, p. 146) -. The author proposes some generic variations: "El viudo Román" is almost a short novel, since it reaches three times the length of the other stories. However, the conditions of the genre are maintained: the narration is centered on a character and a significant event and moment.

The issues are already somewhat removed from indigenous or social issues, never entirely, of course; the indigenous appears as a circumstantial character who contributes to the construction of the scene: servants, residents of poor neighborhoods, the sick. In return, the number of Creole characters, to a great extent decadent, and their concerns, emotions, and searches, which are hardly specified in a trajectory of intensity characteristic of the short story, increases. These are mainly female characters, except for "El viudo Román", although even in that story the plot revolves around the concept of appropriation of women. The feminist discourse is clearly perceived in gender conditioning, particularly those of romantic love, marriage, and motherhood as a bio-political mandate, and the imposition of patriarchy, in a range of characters already analyzed by Christine Hüttinger and María Luisa Domínguez:

Society classifies women in two major classifications: at the top is the married one, the one who proudly bears the label of "the legitimate", as opposed to the lover. [...] Two stigmas can break this order: the first is to be sterile, in the words of Gertrudis in *Los convidados de Agosto* "machorra" [...] The second stigma is getting divorced; in this regard, with the sense of humor that characterizes her, the author reflects that with Lupita, a character from *El eterno femenino* [...] On the other hand, there is the single one. (2015, pp. 89-90)

In certain cases, a certain hope is proposed for the character who manages to flee from that society, as stated in "Las amistades efímeras": the author does not create a heroine whose courage saves her from the comiteca tyranny, but a Gertrudis "almost mute", "judicious" and "lazy", waiting for a boyfriend who would never materialize; however, the story hints at the almost disdain and reluctance necessary to renounce patriarchal mandates, the importance of a network of women that can sustain those who leave a conservative society - which, as will be seen, is a very distant exception to the rule— and offers a reflection on the motivation for writing communicated by the narrator who confesses: "I was building my life around human memory and the eternity of words" (Castellanos, 2005, p. 145). The outcome of the story is a writer's conclusion: "When I got home I took my notebook and opened it. For a long time, I was absorbed in the blank page. I wanted to write and I couldn't. What for? It is so difficult! Maybe, I was telling myself with my head between my hands, maybe it is easier to live." (Castellanos, 2005, p. 145)

The main concern of these female characters is singleness and the negative assessment of that state in the reduced Creole society of feudal principles at a time of Agrarian Reform that has stripped families without influence. Isolation hangs over all the characters, which brings consequently

the feeling of loneliness that characterizes the characters, as Almudena Mejías Alonso has pointed out:

Loneliness oppresses the protagonists, forcing them to be isolated subjects from their social and even family environment and that is given by a powerful/weak opposition relationship in which the law of the strongest prevails, thus fostering a lack of communication that leads to the dehumanization of the characters to the point that if one of them dares to—at least try—to break the fence, that one is going to be forever condemned by the others to isolation.

This opposition will constitute the core of the story and in it, the weak protagonist will be the woman in front of the man, powerful by nature in a society that Rosario Castellanos paints traditionalist. (Mejías, 2015, p. 281)

Single female families are the weakest link in the chain. In Castellanos - contrary to what happens, for example, in Jane Austen's novels during the booming Georgian and Victorian English economy - a series of spinsters only impose an adverse fate on their heirs: feudal and patriarchal society imposes a barrier of gossip, festivities, and superiorities that prevents its own development: it is the familiar model of almost all the stories that make up the volume—except in "Las amistades..." -: "Vals « Capricho », "Los convidados de Agosto" and "El viudo Román". The timid rebellion of some men in these family cores is not enough to break the siege that they have imposed with the support of other women, including indigenous people and prostitutes, not only Creole women, eager for the loss of their fellows - for Castellanos does not hesitate to denounce this lack of solidarity, or even minimal compassion, between women.

The story cleverly employs such attitudes to achieve decisive effects on the structure of the story, as a trigger for Emelina's "downfall" - in the story that gives the book its title, "Los convidados de Agosto" -: the spinster who attends the fair in August intending to get out of the familiar routine of confinement, she attends the bullring where she faints and wakes up in the arms of a man with whom she exposes herself and plans to escape; but she will be stopped by a family friend. The female character, Emelina, is characterized by a series of actions and attitudes: the dreamy attitude with which the story begins, the fear of continuing to wait for an opportunity to marry, the clash with the description of her family - a sister who is also single, a brother alluded to for his libertine behavior and a crazy mother—and her friend with whom she will attend the bullring, the reception of both, with “an accurate shout that triggered the hilarity of all”: “Emelina and Concha had to do the unaware of a raucous *Two in the afternoon!* Yelled at them by some professional nickname” (Castellanos, 2005, p. 174). The actions confirm her vulnerability and lead her to the climatic outcome:

her encounter with the outsider, her determination to accompany him to drink or, rather, to let herself be carried away by him through the streets of Comitán, and her determination to elope with him, when Enrique, a friend of her brother, drags her away from the man with whom Emelina tried to discover the aspects of life she had evaded:

When she became fully aware that the opportunity had passed, Emelina began to howl like a madwoman, like an animal.

Enrique turned away from her. Let her stay here, get home however she could. He couldn't take that wild, inconsolable howl any longer.

Enrique started walking aimlessly through the desolate streets. From afar came the echo of the marimbas, the rockets, the fair. But it did not even turn down when Enrique knocked, with the agreed knock, on the door of the brothel. (Castellanos, 2005, p. 180)

This complexity of the feminine in the social structure reaches its peak in “El viudo Román”, almost a tragic tale with a Greek imprint, almost a detective or Dostoevskian tale. The man who destroys the family of his wife's lover, who died shortly after the marriage, through the younger sister, disowned the day after the marriage. Women are the currency of the values of masculinity. Although the young Romelia has adopted the patriarchal system from which she believes to be favored, via advantageous marriage, it turns out to be the object of exchange, manipulable, symbolic, of men, through economic, ecclesiastical, and male paternal power to pay an affront of rivalry caused by another woman in the same circumstances as Romelia, twenty years ago. The structure, full of unexpected twists and with the last final revelation, Romelia's innocence, and Román's elaborate plan, responds to the forcefulness of the story: “The modern tale that was born in the 19th century is, according to Baquero Goyanes, essentially argumentative and it is generally built around an intense vital moment or around a gray moment that summarizes an existence.” (Pavisani, 2019, p. 108).

The transformation that *Álbum de familia* meant — Rosario Castellanos's last narrative book, published in 1971, the year in which she was named Mexico's ambassador to Israel — was even more decisive, compared to the author's previous short story. The stories in this book leave the Chiapas province to settle in an urban setting, since the theme is related to problems such as “choosing a way of life to carry out a literary vocation” (Castellanos, June 4, 2020). The Fondo de Cultura Económica's edition includes a fragment of an interview with Margarita García Flores about this book:

Although the city is not mentioned, it is a condition for this new series of characters that I had not touched before. They could not occur in any

rural area because they are quite sophisticated intellectually, nor in a province because they would immediately emigrate to the capital. But the city is not mentioned either as a landscape or as a figure or as something that has a direct influence (Castellanos, June 4, 2020).

In this sense, Rosario Castellanos moves towards the urban tale, of complex definition:

Faced with the question of what is urban in literature, it should be answered that urban is not necessarily what happens within the city. A narrative can legitimately be located in the city but refer to a way of thinking, acting, and expressing oneself that is rural or alien to the universe understood by the urban. The latter, the urban, has its specific ways of manifesting itself, its languages, its unique problems: in short, a particular universe. Consequently, it could be affirmed that the urban narrative deals with the themes and behaviors that urban development has generated, and always through peculiar languages (Guido Tamayo, 1999, p. 2).

Lauro Zavala (2000) records a proliferation of a type of urban tale to which he dedicates an anthology that goes from 1979 to 1999, which is characterized by humor, irony, and parody, so it does not include or mention Rosario Castellanos, what would make her a precursor of those strategies in the story, since humor, sarcastic and disappointed, is fundamental in these stories.

In effect, the space is reduced to upper-class houses; once again, female characters as protagonists; but she is a type of woman at the opposite to those of *Los convidados...*, "realistic" women. Then they turn out even more hopeless stories: in the previous stories the characters had no opportunity to go out to look for possibilities of happiness; in these stories, on the other hand, the protagonists have made their transcendental and daily decisions freely. And yet, they did not reach the fullness that, it is suggested, was promised to them because of the fulfillment of the marriage mandate or an intellectual, professional, or artistic fulfillment. This awareness, plus the narrated situations, produces an interior narrative technique centered on the protagonist, either as a narrator-character or as a narrator focused on the protagonist, with elements of flow of consciousness and narration, which does not make judgments about the social structure in which it lives⁴.

4 "Rosario does not try to show the slavery of women in the home, but what the woman herself suffers from her inner self. This confinement is focused on a preponderant symbol that functions as a common denominator in the newly married woman, who cooks for her husband, Edith, the «slave», even on Sundays, who only conforms in her free time to be a «lady of society» or Justina, who has a deep preference for her son over her daughters: submission." (Nélida Jeannette, 2009, p. 104)

In "Lección de cocina", the woman previously "lost in classrooms; in streets, in offices, in cafes; wasted skills", by the time of the story she is a housewife facing the conflict of preparing food for her husband; then she turns the preparation of a steak into a metaphor for married life, sexual initiation, poor housekeeping skills, the balance between intellectual work life, motherhood, the suspicion of infidelity and the final failure of the femininity, hinted with irony. As for the storytelling structure, the female character does not go from an initial situation to a final one, but a transformation of the meat set on fire, in a kind of metaphorical story appropriate to the narrative technique.

"Domingo" is the story of Edith, an artist, from the upper or upper-middle class: "I have never pretended to be more than a bourgeoisie. A small, small bourgeoisie. And that is a tough job!", Declares the protagonist. As the story progresses, there is a continuous contrast between the description of the well-matched marriage, harmonious enough to receive friends on a Sunday within the story, and the revelation that it is an open marriage, Edith's first thought is directed to her lover, with whom she has just broken up; while Carlos, her husband, moves with self-confidence: in Edith's consciousness flow, which is the technique with which the story is narrated, it is discovered that he was unfaithful first. Each situation in the story suggests the possibility of the appearance of new lovers, as well as the constant confirmation that their marriage will never be dissolved, a strongly established order of appearances, unspoken infidelity agreements, knowledge of each other's weaknesses. The planned meeting includes only men: Octavio, Hugo, Vicente, Jorge, Weston, a male brotherhood in which Edith almost came to serve as a caregiver, attending to their concerns as a couple, vocation, and fatherhood. Her personal fulfillment is sustained by that already solidified marital structure, which includes her artistic work and the care of her garden: an anticlimactic ending —because in reality there is no conflict itself—, without increased tension, but with an intimate and psychological revelation:

She saw herself obliterated by Rafael's absence, and an air of disappointment nearly darkened her face. But she remembered the fabric she started working on in her study, the peculiar brush of corduroy trousers against her legs; the old sweater, as natural as a second skin. Monday. Now she also remembered that she had an appointment with the gardener. Together they would inspect that hydrangea massif that did not want to grow well (Castellanos, 2005, p. 264).

No better luck runs Justina, in "Cabecita blanca", the widow who met all the guidelines of womanhood: virgin until marriage, after a devoted dedication to God, submission to her husband, successive pregnancies, and childbirth.

All this is recreated by the lady while she is already a widow who feels relieved by the death of her husband. She lives long enough to fulfill her last obligations, those of "cabecita blanca", a colloquial expression dedicated to elder women heads of families. However, it is clear to the reader, through Ernest Hemingway's⁵ "iceberg" storytelling technique, that her family holds multiple secrets that Justina clings not to discover -her only son's homosexuality, long-term relationships and ephemeral that he maintains with supposed assistants, the bitterness and failures of her female daughters.

The longest story, as Castellanos usually organizes her storybooks, is at the end of the volume: "Family Album" —a particularly suggestive title, since there is no kinship between the characters, but rather an intellectual affinity—. The story revolves around a meeting of cultured ladies, satellites of her teacher, Matilde Casanova, "the Mexican poet recently awarded the Nations Prize." The group of alumni of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters attends the invitation in a coastal city. It is an almost theatrical exercise —an aspect of the modern tale: its capacity for hybridization—, in which as a first act, there is a request of an uninvited journalist who intends to introduce herself to the meeting. Victoria, the poet's secretary, holds a dialogue with revelations about the Mexican artistic environment, quite critical and ironic, not only from the literary world but also from journalism and feminist thought, because, when asked by the assistant, the journalist responds: "Do I look like I was born yesterday or like I'm crazy? No, I am by no means a feminist. In my work, I need men's trust and women's friendship. In my private life, I have not yet renounced either love or marriage." (Castellanos, 2005, p.277).

Then comes a second act, the alumni meeting: Matilde Casanova does not seem to recognize her students; they do not recognize each other: some have renounced literature in exchange for marriage or isolation, others have made a teaching career and others resort to formulas that guarantee a medium recognition or scandalous measures, in the opinion of their classmates. In this council of women, there is minimal room for solidarity, hardly sarcasm, and irony, even for the successful and sublime Matilde. This story is, then, a recreation of the Mexican intellectual field - as P. Burdieu (1971, pp. 135-182) - as a system of influence and counterweight that directly and individually affects the creative project of each artist.

5 "If you find it helpful for people to find out, I always try to write according to the iceberg principle. There are seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate, and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show." (Hemingway, 1968, p. 216).

In a third act, the secretary closes this narrative-theatrical hybrid: she has contemplated all the negative consequences of artistic success, she has seen the monstrous part of Matilde and the social subjugation of the monster. Recognizing that she submitted her possible talent, she concludes, finally, that her determination to shut up and renounce literature, in exchange for Matilde's care, is the appropriate option in a world of simulations, demands, judgments, and loneliness. Well, as two of the friends comment in the last dialogue: "Do you think it's worth writing a book?", To which another responds: "I don't think so. There already are too many."

In this recreation of Virginia Woolf's lectures in "A Room of My Own", Rosario Castellanos transcends the incipient discussions about female writing: it is not enough to write and have the conditions to do so; writing and any intellectual activity is a continuous debate between the models imposed on the feminine and venturing towards a way of life without instructions or guarantees. The profession of the artist in a society that tolerates, only under certain circumstances and conditions, the exercise of writing is a constant of questions and concerns that women begin to experience without guides or models, in the current of nonsense.

Rosario Castellanos considered the recreation of a concrete significant moment that requires reducing events and people to essential features. In this sense, it coincides with forms of the construction of the story as the revelation of a vital enigma. The actions and conflicts of the characters converge towards this revelation. Sometimes, by the recourse of a confessional narrator, this revelation is communicated verbally; in others, with an external but focused narrator, this revelation is suggested to the reader and barely intuited by the character. The diversity of characters —the indigenous, the Creole, the urban woman—, with their respective stories and ways of seeing the world, pessimistic and in different wise ways, make up that universe recreated in just a few narrow streets, old and modern mansions: a universe of pressing concerns about the feminine, the indigenous, the rural and the urban; on artistic creation and human freedom. The stories of Rosario Castellanos, a production distributed between 1960 and 1971, not only reflect but also address, unionize, question. Astonishment and revelation, elements that bring the story closer to the poem, make these stories an opportunity, often neglected, to know a deeply human and universal aspect of an aesthetic of hopelessness.

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