

Twentieth-Century
Literary Criticism

TCLC 153



Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol. 153

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Preface

Since its inception more than fifteen years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities and over 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Thomson Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

Organization of the Book

A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." In *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*, edited by Charles Bernstein, 73-82. New York: Roof Books, 1990. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 127, edited by Janet Witlec, 3-8. Detroit: Gale, 2003.

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Elena Garro

1920-1998

Mexican novelist, short-story writer, playwright, essayist, and memoirist.

INTRODUCTION

Best known in the English-speaking world as the author of the novel *Los recuerdos del porvenir* (1963; *Recollections of Things to Come*), Garro is considered by many critics to have been one of the greatest twentieth-century Latin-American writers.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Garro was born in Puebla, Mexico, in 1920. She studied at the National Autonomous University in Mexico City and was active in Julio Bracho's theater group as both a choreographer and an actress. In 1937 Garro married Mexican poet Octavio Paz. The union was stormy both personally and professionally, with Garro claiming that Paz intentionally damaged her budding career as an actress. She would later use her fiction and drama as a platform from which to denounce many of Paz's social and aesthetic theories. The couple traveled to Europe and briefly lived in the United States when Paz received a Guggenheim grant. Paz filed for divorce in 1959, but the Mexican government did not recognize the judgment as legal until many years later. In the early 1950s Garro stayed in Switzerland while she recovered from a serious illness; it was during this time that she wrote *Recollections of Things to Come*. In the late 1950s Garro moved between Mexico and Paris, finally returning to her homeland more permanently in 1963. *Recollections of Things to Come* won the prestigious Villaurrutia Prize in Mexico in 1964. Actively involved in the defense of Mexico's native Indian rights, Garro published politically charged works that led to her detention by Mexican authorities after the massacre in the Plaza de Tlatelolco in October 1968. She was then placed under "arraigo," meaning her passport was revoked and she was not allowed to leave the country. Garro fled Mexico anyway, moving first to New York and later to Spain. In 1993 she returned to Mexico, where she and her daughter by Paz settled in Cuernavaca. The novel *Testimonios sobre Mariana* (first published serially in 1967 and then in novel form in 1981; *Testimonies about Mariana*) won the Juan Grijalbo Prize in 1980. Garro died of a heart attack in Cuernavaca in 1998.

MAJOR WORKS

The common theme in Garro's work is the contrast between imagination and reality, often depicted as a conflict between two types of characters who represent opposing worldviews: adult and child, male and female, white and Indian. While one represents the limited perspective of reason, logic, and chronological order, the other allows access into a fantasy world unbound by time and created by the force of the imagination. As with many Latin-American writers of her generation, Garro used the technique of magic realism to portray historical reality interfused with fantastical, dream-like elements. *Recollections of Things to Come* is considered a seminal example of this genre of literature. Although it does not follow strict chronological order, the novel takes place during the period in Mexican history when President Plutarco Elias Calles sought to limit the power of the Roman Catholic church, sparking a revolt by Church supporters. The story is told from the viewpoint of an imaginary Mexican town, which takes part in the rebellion. Trying to save a well-loved priest, the women of the town conspire against the military forces. The central image in the novel is stone, into which one woman turns, symbolizing women's immobilization throughout history. Garro's most important novel after *Recollections of Things to Come* is *Testimonies about Mariana*. Consisting of three separate stories narrated by characters who verbally reconstruct their relationships with Mariana, an enigmatic woman without a past or a future, the novel asks the reader to piece together the three viewpoints into a coherent story in order to bring Mariana, who exists nowhere but in fiction, to life. With no identity of her own, Mariana represents the universal problem of identity—and hence, reality—itsself. The question of the existence of reality is again posed in *Reencuentro de personajes* (1982; *Reunion of Characters*), in which Garro assembles the cast of characters from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* in order to explore the fictional nature of the world overall. Garro's last novel, *Y Matarazo no llamó . . .* (1989; *And Matarazo Never Called Back . . .*) is a Kafkaesque portrayal of Mexico's highly charged political climate that anticipates the massacre of Tlatelolco and the cruel repression of the student movement in 1968. *Memorias de España* (1992; *Memoirs of Spain*) also centers on politics, as Garro recounts her experiences with Paz in Spain during the Spanish Civil War.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Although Garro remains lesser known than most of her male counterparts, Garro's innovative narrative techniques, coupled with her focus on upturning social and historical hierarchies, have led many critics to place her among the most important figures in the Latin American "boom" period. Gabriela Mora remarked, "With demanding artistry, Garro has explored the Latin American self and society in a body of work that deserves a place alongside the better known writings of her peers."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Felipe Angeles* (play) 1954
Andarse por las ramas (play) 1957
La señora en su balcón (play) 1957
Un hogar sólido, y otros piezas en un acto (plays) 1958
Los recuerdos del porvenir [Recollections of Things to Come] (novel) 1963
La semana de colores (short stories) 1964
El árbol (novella) 1967
Revolucionarios mexicanos (collected essays) 1968
Andamos huyendo Lola (short stories) 1980
Testimonios sobre Mariana [published in the journal *Espejo* in 1967] (novel) 1981
Reencuentro de personajes (novel) 1982
La casa junto al río (novel) 1983
Y Matarazo no llamó . . . (novel) 1989
Memorias de España (memoir) 1992
Busca mi esquila and Primer amor [First Love and Look for My Obituary] (novellas) 1996
El accidente y otros cuentos (short stories) 1997
La vida empieza a las tres (short stories) 1997
Mi hermanita Magdalena (novella) 1998

CRITICISM

Robert K. Anderson (essay date spring 1985)

SOURCE: Anderson, Robert K. "Myth and Archetype in *Recollections of Things to Come*." *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 9, no. 2 (spring 1985): 213-27.

[In the following essay, Anderson finds that the Mexican social landscape is secondary to larger existential issues in Garro's *Recollections of Things to Come*.]

Recollections of Things to Come (1963), Elena Garro's first published novel, vividly portrays life in a small Mexican town, Itepec, during the late 1920s. In part, it focuses upon a broad gamut of regional phenomena; yet, in the words of Emmanuel Carballo, "the social relations, economy, politics and religion" depicted therein merely "occupy a secondary position."¹ Essentially, although Garro presents significant "local" concerns in the novel, she also directs our attention toward existential realities. According to her, "the great writer will be the one who presents the Mexican as a universal being."² In *Recollections of Things to Come* she achieves this goal primarily through an incessant infusion of mythic and archetypal motifs—elements that constitute the cornerstone of this study.

The teller of the tale is a "pueblo-narrator," a semi-personification of the town, which attempts to communicate its tragic history. The basis of the chronicle is a kaleidoscope of memories that appear unordered, "as water flows into water,"³ within a rock or scrying-stone, into which the narrator peers. The rock is located on a hill overlooking the town.⁴

These reminiscences transport us from one extreme of Itepec to another, providing a sketch of small-town Mexican life during the Cristero Rebellion.⁵ Consequently, we become acquainted with a wide variety of fictional yet credible characters. We overhear their customary chats regarding their social, political and economic woes and are even permitted to perceive their most intimate thoughts.

Continually ordering and interpreting past events, the "pueblo-narrator" concentrates on the brutal government-ordered occupation of Itepec by General Francisco Rosas and his soldiers, and its negative effect upon the town. This re-creation of the historical past captures the resultant fear and inertia that spread throughout the populace. In substance, as readers of *Recollections of Things to Come*, we witness a sweeping spectrum of local activities that constitute the "costumbrista" foundation upon which Garro establishes a universal structure.

As a backdrop for her account, Garro selects a virtual replica of the mythic underworld, or realm of the dead. The terror produced by Rosas' occupation (p. 230) causes the inhabitants to assume a life of estrangement and quietude (p. 208). They renounce hope (p. 111), embrace a "voluntary forgetfulness" (p. 112) and solemnly abjure living within the sight of the general's eyes (p. 264). In effect, they allow alien wills to govern their entire existence.

The result is a village that can be only characterized as a "circular hell" (p. 255), a "dead" community (p. 207) occupied by prisoners (pp. 26 and 230) and "opaque bodies" (p. 28), by the living dead, as it were:

All days seem like the same day, acts become the same act, and all persons are a single useless person. The world loses its variety, light is annihilated, and miracles are abolished. The inertia of those repeated days kept me quiet as I contemplated the vain flight of my hours and waited for the miracle that persisted in not happening. The future was the repetition of the past.

(p. 58)

In such an environment, man finds himself bound to a preternatural destiny, to the iron laws of cyclical process. Hence, the novel's title: *Recollections of Things to Come*.⁶

Suddenly and unexpectedly, a foil to the passive Ixtepequeños, a dynamic stranger named Felipe Hurtado enters the moribund town. He and Julia Andrade, Rosas' mistress, presumably fall in love. As the jealous general prepares to lead the young man away to the site of his execution, "time [stops] dead" (p. 138). While the soldiers and the townspeople are for the moment magically reduced to "motionless figures in the streets and on the balconies" (p. 139), Felipe and Julia flee from the constraining circular hell epitomized by the community. Part I concludes as the two open this repressive circle and depart on horseback, never to return.

The second and last section of the novel centers on Rosas and Isabel Moncada, a solitary young woman deeply captivated by Felipe's personal qualities. The now lonely general continually punishes himself and the town for Julia's flight; Isabel, yearning to escape her unendurable solitude, decides to leave her family and live with Rosas.

The chronicle ends as both bemoan their fate. Repentant of his most recent blood-baths and conscious of his increasing alienation, Rosas wallows in anguish. After being disowned by her parents and aware that her brothers have been murdered by her new companion and his troops, Isabel is escorted by a "curandera" to the Sanctuary overlooking the town in order to be exorcised and freed from Rosas' power. There, as the novel concludes, she is transformed into a stone.

The binary framework of *Recollections*, which encourages comparison and contrast of the positive and negative denouements of the first and second parts, respectively, displays definite mythic underpinnings. In her avowed endeavor to universalize Ixtepec's panorama of passive futility, Garro blends myth and literature. Part I of the novel describes Julia's archetypal voyage through a labyrinth as she seeks deliverance from her negative environment. It also depicts her acceptance of the redemptive path offered by Felipe, a virtual incarnation of the archetypal messenger.⁷

Part II recounts Isabel's contrasting anti-heroic journey and her consequential petrification, which is reminiscent of several mythic figures who have chosen to de-

cline the noble course of action. In order to enhance the reader's understanding of these mutually contradictory modes of existence and to augment the vital dramatic tension conveyed in both parts, the author also employs three major sets of mytho-poetic antitheses: translucence-opacity, centrifugence-centripetence, and fluidity-petrification. We will now examine each of the mythic components.

A logical point of departure for this study is Felipe, the archetypal messenger created in the image of Hermes, Thoth and the Holy Ghost, figures found in classical, Egyptian and Christian mythologies, respectively.⁸ According to a consensus of these and other legendary accounts, this type of mythic figure is "the 'other,' the 'alien.' . . . He is not of the world, . . . but he comes and is from elsewhere" (Eliade, p. 132). Moreover, he is given the sacred charge of descending to a region of anguish, silence, sleep, forgetfulness and darkness, of awakening its inhabitants and of encouraging them to raise their eyes toward the light (Eliade, pp. 129-30).

In Part I, Felipe's unexpected arrival is accompanied by a number of allusions aligning him with the universally recognizable essence of this archetypal hero. The most obvious of these is the following: "The stranger's unexpected presence broke the silence. He was the messenger" (p. 59). Moreover, his descent to the valley floor (pp. 3 and 111) takes him to the underworld setting for his calling, an inferno of "menacing darkness" (p. 18).

While the Ixtepequeños passively endure their self-imposed quiescence and opacity, this alien or "stranger" (pp. 33, 34, 35, 44, 48, 49 ff.)—an epithet designed and repeatedly employed to dissociate him from the townspeople and to reinforce the aforementioned parallel—is, from the very beginning, clearly defined as "a modern man, a man of action" (p. 3). He belongs to "that group of dynamic young men who are looking for employment—something brilliant, productive" (p. 69). His entrance into the town is particularly suggestive in that he refuses to look upon the everyday realities of Ixtepec's solitary, indifferent and inactive spectators. Instead, he symbolically directs his eyes toward "the roofs and the trees" (p. 34).⁹

He enters the town as though magically sensing the layout of the streets (p. 34). During his short but influential sojourn his supernatural aura is intensified as he makes already lit cigarettes appear in thin air by merely stretching out his arm (p. 35), steps on plants without leaving an imprint (p. 51), passes through a storm with a lamp still lit and his clothes and hair dry (p. 100) and accomplishes other similar feats. It is not surprising, then, that he is characterized as a "magician" (p. 143).

There is no denying that Elena Garro takes great care to specify and maintain a distinction between Felipe and the inferior townspeople, whose excess of inertia evokes

within Felipe a great deal of anguish (p. 112). Unlike them, this mythic figure refuses to be corrupted by their "misfortune" (p. 59). On the contrary, his actions are responsible for some noteworthy (though temporary) changes in Ixtepec. Obviously, one of the most memorable of his contributions is the introduction of poetry (pp. 100-01) and "magic theater" (p. 112) which are capable of infusing "ilusión" (pp. 100 and 113),¹⁰ or hope, into the lives of his newly acquired friends. This "ilusión" opens the way for some of them to transcend temporarily their unhappy "enchantment" (p. 115) and the repressive circle in which they find themselves trapped.

Felipe's mission clearly consists of teaching the Ixtepequeños to renounce their self-imposed solitude and inertia and to embrace a dream. Only then can they develop into "something more than spectators of the violent life of the soldiers" (p. 116). His calling as a metamorphic agent is especially highlighted in his reaction to the word "metamorphosis": Felipe's "face turned into the face of a ten-year old boy. . . . The word caused a carnival to light up in [his] eyes" (p. 56).

Julia similarly exudes a mythic aura. In her case, however, the supernatural quality is revealed through her luminosity and capacity to break through the bonds of a figurative centripetence, traits that will be detailed later. In essence, she exhibits vital, positive personal attributes that ultimately enable her to escape the penumbra of the townspeople. Like Felipe, Julia seems strikingly incongruous to them: "There had never been anyone like her in Ixtepec. Her manner, her way of talking, walking, and looking at men, everything about Julia was different" (p. 35).

Totally different in attitude from the Ixtepequeños, Julia shares Felipe's hope and dynamism. He is depicted as the "unexpected traveler" (p. 112); she is similarly portrayed as a voyager dedicated to transcending her blocked and petrified environment:

She walked on in bare feet, in the presence of a future that rose before her eyes like a white wall. Behind the wall was the story that had guided her as a child: "Once upon a time there was a talking bird, a singing fountain, and a tree that bore golden fruit." Julia walked on in the certainty of finding it.

(p. 130)

Julia's guiding light incorporates universal elements commonly associated with an odyssey. It is apparent that their inclusion in the novel is part of the author's deliberate and concerted effort to strengthen the work's mythic framework.

The fairy tale's major motifs—a talking bird, a fountain, and a tree—appear together in a number of folktales. Some of the Mexican versions highlighting these

three thematic elements are: "The Singing Tree, the Speaking Bird and the Golden Water,"¹¹ "The Talking Bird, the Singing Tree and the Water of Life,"¹² "The Golden Fountain, the Speaking Bird and the Singing Tree,"¹³ "The Speaking Bird,"¹⁴ and "The Singing Tree."¹⁵ All share the following underlying mythic features: 1) a protagonist's separation from a familiar environment; 2) a demanding journey (following a warning to the hero/heroine against distraction from the mission at hand, lest he/she be turned to stone), during which the traveler seeks the universally recognizable bird, fountain and tree; and 3) a transcendence, or successful return, to the original point of departure.

Julia's paradigm, then, is a fairy tale, and these are often narrative re-creations of the quest on the level of the imagination. Her formidable task involves the attainment of a dream, or "ilusión." It requires a true exercise of will capable of transporting her to the symbolic tree (p. 131) associated with Felipe and the transcendence that he offers. That being the case, she rises up against Rosas' threats and restrictions, momentarily risking her own well-being in order to warm Felipe of his imminent execution.

Both Julia and Felipe exhibit positive personal traits inasmuch as each, within certain limitations, designs and creates the world in his/her manner. In and of itself, however, this is insufficient to help them realize their dream. It would seem that only unfeigned love, an active opening up of one's being to another, brings about their more permanent escape from the total petrification personified by the collective of Ixtepec.

As Part I comes to a close, Felipe is confronted by Rosas and his troops, who intend to escort him to the site of his execution. At this precise moment time's flow suddenly halts:

Something that had never happened before occurred: time stopped dead. . . . I was outside time, suspended in a place without wind, without murmurs, without the sound of leaves or sighing. . . . I don't know how long we were lost in that motionless space.

A mule-driver entered the town. He said that it was already getting light in the country, and when he came to the edge of town he encountered the darkness of night. It frightened him to see that the night continued only in Ixtepec. He told us that the night seemed darker when it was surrounded by morning. In his fear he did not know whether to cross the border between light and darkness. He was still hesitating when he saw a man on horseback with a woman in pink in his arms. The man was wearing dark clothing. The woman was laughing. The mule-driver wished them good day.

"Good night!" Julia shouted.

We knew it was she because of his description of the pink dress, the laughter, the gold beads. They galloped away.

When they emerged from the night they disappeared on the road to Cocula, in the splendor of the rose-colored light of dawn. The mule-driver came into town and told us how all Ixtepec was sleeping round and black, with motionless figures in the streets and on the balconies.

"It was a sea of blackness, with dawn all around it," he said.

We never heard of the lovers again.

(pp. 138-39)

It is apparent that their miraculous delivery from the uroboric, or circular prison, is a direct result of their decision to forge their own destinies and to reach out voluntarily to one another. Although it is not explicitly stated that Julia and Felipe are in love, their actions (as well as the opinions communicated by some of their acquaintances) lead us to this conclusion. The "pueblo-narrator," moreover, furnishes a choice clue in the following verbal assault on the general: "In his immobile time the trees did not change their leaves, the stars were fixed, the verbs 'to come' and 'to go' were the same; Francisco Rosas stopped the amorous current that makes and unmakes words and deeds and kept us in his circular hell" (p. 255). It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that Felipe and Julia are able to transcend the underworld of Ixtepec only because they seek out and partake of the "amorous current."

Perhaps Luisa Perdigó's elaboration of this motif in the works of Octavio Paz, Garro's former husband, can shed further light on this preternatural phenomenon. According to Perdigó, Paz "realizes that it is through unfettered love that we conquer the world, inasmuch as when we reach out from ourselves we arrive at 'otherness' and we are one with the universe."¹⁶

In applying this postulate to the novel, we find that one of the principal differences between the idealized couple and the disparaged townspeople is that the latter are "absorbed in themselves" (p. 242), in their own fears, while Felipe and Julia reach out to one another. Their mutual positive qualities, above all their dynamism and their capacity to love (Julia is the "personification of love," p. 90), are seemingly synchronized on a mythic plane to create what Paz would call "the metaphor 'par excellence,' the point of encounter of all power and the seed of all forms. The couple is, once again, reconquered time, time before time."¹⁷

It would certainly appear that Garro asserts that only self-creation and reciprocal love born of active hope, or "ilusión," can magically deliver us from life's labyrinth, even from time itself. Conversely, a life of passivity and solitude is tantamount to death. When one is unwilling to take an active role in forging one's own life, one's memory, the future is nothing but a swift retrogression through "invariable time" (p. 96) toward the ultimate oblivion.

In direct contrast to the positive transcendental path followed by Julia and Felipe in the first section of the novel, Part II traces Isabel's anti-heroic fate. Although she is initially portrayed as dreaming of accompanying her brothers to the archetypal mountains (p. 155), she eventually retreats within herself. Unlike the pair highlighted in Part I, she chooses to nurture inertia and solitude rather than dynamism and love. Consequently, her life-style converges with that of the Ixtepequeños described below:

Absorbed in themselves, they did not realize that one lifetime is not long enough to discover the infinite flavors of mint, the lights of a night, or the multitude of colors that colors are made of. One generation follows another, and each repeats the acts of the one before it. Only an instant before dying, they discover that it was possible to dream and to create the world in their own way, to awaken then and begin a new creation. . . . For several seconds they return to the hours that guard their childhood and the smell of grass, but it is already late and they have to say goodbye, and they discover that in a corner their life is waiting for them, and their eyes open to the dark panorama of their disputes and their crimes, and they go away astonished at the creation they made of their years.

(pp. 242-43)

Having adopted personal qualities that are at variance with those generally associated with Felipe and Julia, Isabel must experience a dissimilar "return." Corresponding to the mythic pattern perceived in the fairy tales mentioned above, two diametrically opposite results are conceivable: dynamism or stasis. The last view of the heroic couple is one of vigorous movement. Isabel, on the other hand, deservedly suffers the lot of those unsuccessful travelers pictured in the fairy tale who are transfigured into stone:

The future did not exist and the past was gradually disappearing. She looked at the glazed sky and the countryside, imperturbable and identical to it: round, limited by mountains as permanent as that round day, which was limited by two identical nights. Isabel was in the center of the day like a rock in the middle of the countryside. From her heart stones sprang forth; they ran through her body and made it immovable. . . . After looking for her for a long time, Gregoria found her lying far down the hill, transformed into stone.

(pp. 285 and 287)

The marked disparity between the two previously delineated species of universal heroes and denouements leads the reader to an appreciation of those who tread the positive path. While exalting those who actively create their own lives, *Recollections* also indicts those who fail to take possession of their days (p. 143), only to become mere automatons.

This irreconcilable incompatibility, so effectively conveyed by a binary framework of contrasting personages and outcomes, is likewise emphasized through a litany

of additional dual structures. As mentioned earlier, these are mytho-poetic images or cross-conflicts that can be schematically represented by three major sets of antitheses: 1) translucence-opacity; 2) centrifugence-centripetence; and 3) fluidity-petrification.

Throughout the novel the narrator presents a number of individual and collective characterizations based upon the negative and positive connotations of these polarities. As the plot unfolds, however, the descriptions rooted in the negative poles of these axes—opacity, centripetence and petrification—progressively come to dominate the text. This undoubtedly occurs as the turbulence and fear produced by Rosas' presence further pervades the thoughts of the Ixtepequeños, causing them to accept a totally contemplative lifestyle.

Of the three archetypal axes, the first, translucence-opacity, occurs most frequently. Early in the chronicle this specific conflict is prepared as the "pueblo-narrator" alludes to its inhabitants' "luminous" optimism (p. 8) regarding the desired liberating return of Abacuc and his Zapatistas. However, because "no one [comes] to brighten the days" (p. 28), "the world [turns] opaque" (p. 27). In essence, as their lack of will [causes] each day to be "the same as the one before" (p. 28), they degenerate into "opaque bodies . . . wasting away in unimportant interests" (p. 28).

Diametrically opposed to these invading shadows are glimmers of translucence. These make their appearance as the narrator focuses on special events and on individuals who embrace an "ilusión," or dream. For example, luminosity is emphasized in descriptions of a play and a party. It also plays a vital role in the characterization of Julia and Felipe. The former is "an island of light" (p. 88), a "brilliant image" (p. 127) and a "luminous body" (p. 127). In the same vein, Felipe utters words that are "luminous shapes that appeared and disappeared with the magnificence of fireworks" (p. 112). He is a man in search of "something brilliant, productive" (p. 69).

Though both of these central figures introduce a measure of luminosity into the lives of the Ixtepequeños, the latter still allow the uroborous, the time-worn symbol of unconsciousness, to encircle the town completely. Thus, according to the "pueblo-narrator," the world loses its variety, light is annihilated, and "miracles are abolished" (p. 58). Life, in effect, becomes "tarnished" (p. 111), and the townspeople return to their "gloomy thoughts" (p. 85), to the "dark days" (p. 242).

The decisive defeat of translucence is a direct outcome of Julia's and Felipe's departure. It is also the result of the failure of Father Beltrán's attempted escape and the related deaths of Isabel's two brothers at the hands of Rosas and his soldiers.¹⁸ These events cause the remain-

ing characters to abandon all hope. Resigning themselves to what they deem a closed, inescapable situation, they must inevitably suffer the figurative darkness that subsequently discolors their daily activities. After the luminescence generated by the Arrietas' party, which is a ploy devised to facilitate Father Beltrán's escape, this visual quality completely vanishes: "The date [of the party] that everyone awaited forced its way through the days and arrived as round and perfect as an orange. And like that beautiful golden fruit, it remains in my memory to brighten the darkness that came afterward" (p. 191).

The visual discord between translucence and opacity could, in and of itself, bear the essential tension within the novel. Nevertheless, Elena Garro chooses to augment the vital antagonism within *Recollections* by incorporating antithetical archetypal symbols of centrifugence and centripetence. The circular movement associated with these phenomena appears throughout the work. Allusions to a monotonous periodicity ("Each day became the same as the one before it," p. 28; "those repeated days," p. 58; "each identical day," p. 68; etc.) are plentiful. In addition, we find references to "circles of light" (p. 13), Julia's "magic circle" (p. 89), a star's "luminous circles" (p. 73), the sun's "orbit of heat" (p. 204), the "different orbits" of Isabel and Rosas (p. 246) and "the luminous time that spins around the sun" (p. 255).

In such a context of circles and gyrations, it would not be surprising to discover centripetal and centrifugal motifs. Centripetence, of course, constitutes movement directed toward a central axis, whereas its opposite, centrifugence, consists of movement directed away from that axis.

Both elements play important roles in *Recollections*. The former motif takes on a negative connotation. It is invariably linked to those characters who fail to transcend their negative environment. These find themselves crushed or impelled toward their axis of existence, toward the earth itself. From an abundant repertoire of possible illustrations, the following are perhaps the most striking:

A circle was closing in on me [Ixtepec]. . . . The days weighed on me, and I was uneasy and anxious as I waited for the miracle.

(p. 8)

When [Felix, the Moncada family servant] thought of the future an avalanche of days pressed tightly together came hurling down on him and his house and his children.

(p. 14)

[Isabel's] red dress . . . weighed and coruscated like a stone in the sunlight. . . . From the flowing weight of her dress she tried to imagine Juan and Nicolás.

(pp. 201-02)

[Rosas] felt that he carried on his shoulders all of the weight of the world, and a very ancient weariness made the distance from the hotel to the presbytery interminable.

(p. 271)

Juxtaposed to this descriptive syndrome are antithetical motifs denoting unrestrained flight. With some exceptions, these references to centrifugence are confined to Part I and its magical-poetic portrayal of Julia. Unlike the townspeople, she succeeds in bursting through the limits of the circle, by voluntarily moving away from the axis: "Julia, like an icy rose, gyrated before Francisco Rosas' eyes, then vanished in the frigid wind of the sierra and reappeared floating above the tops of the pinyon trees" (p. 103).

The full significance of these archetypal motifs is perhaps best conveyed in the following passage, which depicts the dissimilar centrifugal and centripetal essences of Julia and Rosas:

In what dawns did Julia float now? She had escaped from the dawns of Ixtepec. Rosas saw her in that instant traveling through the skies of other plazas, and his body felt as heavy as if he were going to be executed that October fifth in the cemetery of Ixtepec.

(pp. 272-73)

Just as opacity and centripetence ultimately erase all vestiges of translucence and centrifugence, so too the negative pole of the third axis decisively vanquishes its antagonist. Specifically, Ixtepec becomes totally petrified in its almost undeviating passivity. In the end, its existence, "the memory of [its] suffering" (p. 288), is reduced to stone as confirmed on pages 3, 6, 254, 264 and 288 of the novel. As might be expected, the inhabitants' inability to control their destiny causes the light of hope to be dimmed, miracles to be abolished and the inertia of the repeated days (p. 58) to permeate their lives. Because of its increasingly passive wait for the arrival of Abacuc and his Zapatistas, Ixtepec is collectively characterized as the pinnacle of staticism. Its residents are truly "inert" (p. 207), "calcined and without hope" (p. 206). Together they constitute "only the stone on which repeated blows fell like imperturbable drops of water" (p. 159).

In contrast to a relative abundance of explicit allusions to the previously described positive antitheses, references to fluidity are mostly implicit. In a few instances, however, Garro makes her point exceedingly clear. For example, the "pueblo-narrator" describes Julia's body as being "luminous and cold as a brook" (p. 246). It likewise calls attention to "her pale pink dresses, adorned with tiny translucent rhinestones that sparkled like drops of water" (p. 116). Indeed, she is even compared to mercury, an element noted for its fluidity: "She escaped from [Rosas] shining and liquid, like a drop of mercury, and slipped away into nameless places" (p. 102).

Unfortunately for the Ixtepequeños, all traces of this positive trait totally fade away. In the end, the ravaging epidemic of inertia infects all. Thus, Ixtepec is reduced to dust, its only memory held within a stone, the supreme symbol of petrification.

In *Recollections of Things to Come* Elena Garro's skillful use of binary structures, of comparison and contrast based upon mythic and archetypal patterns, enables her to achieve her stated goal of presenting her Mexican characters as universal beings. These cleverly employed resources greatly enhance her ability to urge all members of the human race to embrace an "ilusión," to open themselves to one another and to assume full responsibility for their own lives. Failure to do so, according to the novel's universal level of interpretation, will cause them to degenerate into mere automatons irrevocably consumed by the eternal and omnipresent epidemic of inertia.

Notes

1. Emmanuel Carballo, "Todo es presente," *La Cultura en México*, 18 March 1964, p. xix. My translation.
2. Carlos Landero, "Con Elena Garro," *Diorama de la Cultura*, 24 October 1965, p. 9. My translation.
3. Elena Garro, *Recollections of Things to Come*, trans. Ruth L. C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), p. 3. Subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses.
4. The Nahuatl roots of the toponym "Ixtepec"—*itzli* ("obsidian") and *tepetl* ("hill")—are particularly significant when we understand that some Pre-Columbian Meso-American necromancers sought visions of the past and the future in obsidian scrying-stones. These "were known as *aitztl*, or 'water obsidian'" (See Lewis Spence, *Arcane Secrets and Occult Lore of Mexico and Mayan Central America* [London: Rider and Co., 1973], p. 83).
5. The Cristero Rebellion (1926-29) was a popular uprising resulting from clerical resistance against constitutional provisions restricting the powers of the Catholic Church and from governmental effort to enforce these provisions. Because the Catholic clergy declined to obey the regulations, the government closed all Catholic schools. Retaliation by the Church included the suspension of religious service for three years.
6. It should be noted that another prime factor behind Garro's use of temporal circularity is Mexico's Indian substratum. Specifically, this author has admitted her fascination for the "difference between western time brought by the Spaniards

- and finite time which existed in the ancient Mexican world." She has likewise acknowledged their inevitable "fusion" and the positive "new dimension" offered by this fusion (See Roberto Páramo, "Reconsideración de Elena Garro," *El Heraldo Cultural de México*, 31 December 1967, p. 2. My translation.).
7. Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 129.
 8. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 2nd ed., Bollingen Series 17 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 72-73.
 9. This passage alludes to Felipe's mythical descent. In this instance, his perspective comes from below, from the underworld.
 10. In addition to conveying deception, the Spanish word "ilusión" also signifies "dream" or "hope."
 11. Stanley L. Robe, *Mexican Tales and Legends from Los Altos: Folklore Studies*, 20 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 349-59. In this particular tale a queen gives birth to two sons and a daughter. As each is born, the queen's jealous sisters substitute a dog in the baby's place. The king's gardener finds the three discarded children and rears them. One day a woman visits the girl and tells her that her brothers should seek three marvelous objects in order to beautify their garden: the speaking bird, the singing tree, and the golden water. During their respective quests, each of the boys hears frightening voices, looks back, and is turned to stone. Informed of their plight, their sister embarks on her mission to rescue them and to obtain the three treasures. Paying no attention to the enemy voices, she first captures the bird, who reluctantly helps her locate the spring of golden water and the tree that sings. She then succeeds in rescuing her brothers. On her return, the bird reveals to the king that the three youths are his children, and they are taken to the palace to live. [The tales listed in notes 14-17 have similar plots.]
 12. Stanley L. Robe, ed., *Hispanic Folktales from New Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 104-11.
 13. Howard T. Wheeler, *Tales from Jalisco, Mexico: Memoirs of the American Folklore Society*, 35 (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1943), pp. 184-87.
 14. Elaine K. Miller, *Mexican Folk Narrative from the Los Angeles Area: Memoirs of the American Folklore Society*, 56 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), pp. 292-302.
 15. Juan B. Rael, *Cuentos españoles de Colorado y Nuevo México* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1977), pp. 259-63.
 16. Luisa Perdigón, *La estética de Octavio Paz* (Madrid: Playor, 1975), p. 37. My translation.
 17. Octavio Paz, *Corriente alterna*, 9th ed. (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1977), p. 58. My translation.
 18. Because of the Cristero Rebellion, Father Beltrán, the town priest, must flee from the government forces. As in the case of the descriptive mode associated with Felipe and Julia, this heroic figure is likewise portrayed in terms of his translucence. Recounting his attempted escape, one character declares: "In the middle is the padre, as luminous as a burning taper. In half an hour, his holy light will be with the Moncada's, and at dawn, in the sierra, he will illuminate the valley . . ." (pp. 219-20).

Sandra Messinger Cypess (essay date 1985)

SOURCE: Cypess, Sandra Messinger. "Visual and Verbal Distances in the Mexican Theater: The Plays of Elena Garro." In *Woman as Myth and Metaphor in Latin American Literature*, edited by Carmelo Virgillo and Naomi Lindstrom, pp. 44-62. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985.

[In the following essay, Cypess discusses how Garro's plays affect the constructed image of Mexican women in literature.]

The concepts developed by Michel Foucault regarding the use of discourse bring to our attention the fact that implicit in a system of discourse are rules and restrictions, privileges and exclusions.¹ The rules that govern the production of discourse and the procedures that control, select, organize, and redistribute it are expressions of a culture handed down from generation to generation. In Latin American culture, women have generally been considered silent figures, submissive to the patriarchal powers that govern their society, whether they be the fathers of the family or of the Church. Women's real distance from the centers of power can be translated linguistically as a restriction in the production of discourse in literary texts. It is pertinent in this regard to remember Foucault's contention that the fact of writing itself is a systematic conversion of the power relationship between the controller and the controlled; that is, the one who has the power also controls the written word (the discourse).

In applying this concept to the literary tradition, it is apparent to many readers, as Virginia Woolf reminds us in *A Room of One's Own*, that although women may have been visually present as images in literature, they have been verbally absent from the literary tradition as