

Introduction

ELENA GARRO'S FIRST NOVEL, *Recollections of Things to Come* (*Los recuerdos del porvenir*), appeared in 1963 and was awarded the important Xavier Villaurrutia Prize for that year. With action occurring in the 1920's, the novel depicts life in the small Mexican town of Itepec during the grim days of the Cristero rebellion. The town tells its own story against a variegated background of political change, religious persecution, and social unrest. Miss Garro is a masterly storyteller. Writing in a style that is more akin to poetry than to prose, she constructs a plot of dramatic intensity and suspense.

Yet this is a book that does not depend for its effectiveness on narrative continuity. It is a book of episodes, one that leaves with the reader a series of vivid impressions. The colors are bright, the smells are pungent, the many characters clearly drawn in a few bold strokes.

We glimpse intimate scenes of the "passionate and secret" life of those who dwell in the Hotel Jardín: General Francisco Rosas, morbidly obsessed by jealousy; the beautiful, impassive Julia Andrade; the other officers and their mistresses. We see Luchi's squalid bawdyhouse and its slatternly occupants, and in their midst the incongruous presence of the irrational Juan Cariño, who decries the lack of reason of those about him and extols the value of words, the tools of rationality. We attend the gatherings at the home of don Joaquín and doña Matilde Meléndez, where the members of their social circle exchange inconsequential conversation and sip cool drinks on nights of oppressive heat. We observe the snobbery, greed, and selfishness of the wealthy Goríbars. In sharp contrast are the abnegation and integrity of such strong, humble characters as the faithful retainer Félix, the old servant

woman Gregoria, and the young manservant Cástulo, in whose nature any malice or self-seeking has no place.

Interspersed with the major episodes there are subordinate incidents of great power and poignancy, such as the humiliation of don Ramón Martínez at Pando's cantina, the rehearsals for the play and the magic wrought by the rediscovery of illusion, the people's reaction to the closing of the church, the general exaltation accompanying the preparations for doña Carmen's party, and the abortive escape attempt of the mistresses.

But the reality the author imparts to the novel stems not from the outer world of objects and events, the world of clock time, but rather from the skillful mingling of introspective reverie with the dramatic episodes. Sporadically, attention is focused on the inner world of the personages, on what they retain in the depths of the soul, as a means of character delineation. For the protagonists, memories are a refuge, an almost mystical experience, by which they defeat mutability and escape from the calamitous times in which they live, from the violence and cruelty that surround them. The memories from the past, mingled in the present with intimations of the future, thus become the only reality, and time, losing its validity, is refuted.

Martín Moncada's desire to free himself from the shackles of mechanical time is symbolized each night at nine when his servant Félix, "obeying an old custom of the house," stops the clocks. The family then enters "a new time." And Moncada also eschews the "anecdotic time" of the calendar which would deprive him of the "other time" within him, that of his "unlived memory." If he is a failure by worldly standards, it is merely that he cannot accord importance to the things of the real world—the world that others call real—preferring instead to find refuge in his own world of fantasy.

And doña Matilde never quite understands this eccentricity of her brother's until, when the grotesqueness of events has become overwhelming, she grasps the meaning as if by intuition and acknowledges that don Martín has been right in wanting to live "outside of time."

For Isabel and her brothers, who feel a deep mutual kinship for one another and a sense of alienation from those around them, adulthood is resignation to humdrum existence. The past beckons

themselves in the world.” Their youthful resolve to leave Ixtepec to them alluringly, and returns them to the pristine days of their childhood, “when the three shared the infinite surprise of finding is realized at last as, departing by separate routes, they are united in an identical destiny.

Before our eyes, other characters are stripped down to their memories, to what they retain that sets them apart, differentiates them from all the others. And the reason for the General’s obsessive jealousy of Julia is precisely this: her memories—of other times, of other men—will always stand as barricades he can never penetrate, a part of her innermost being he can never possess.

And when time stops dead to permit Julia and Felipe Hurtado to flee from Ixtepec, the fantasy world is made dramatically concrete, clock time is tangibly shown up as the illusion it is.

The book fascinates us, down to the final gruesome episode. In *Recollections of Things to Come*, Miss Garro ensnares us in a shimmering web of pathos and passion, of love and death, that we are not likely to forget easily.

Elena Garro was born in Puebla, Mexico, on December 11, 1920. She studied at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. For a time she arranged choreographies for the Theater of the University, and later served as a journalist in Mexico and the United States. Miss Garro’s marriage to the famous Mexican poet and essayist Octavio Paz subsequently ended in divorce.

In 1954 she began to write for films. She achieved her first fame as a Mexican playwright of note in 1957 with three one-act plays which were presented by the Poesía en Voz Alta drama group. The following year these works were published, along with several other one-act plays by Miss Garro, in a single volume entitled *Un hogar sólido* (A Solid House). Critics hailed the author’s dramatic originality and poetic sensitivity. Other plays followed, establishing further her reputation as a writer of importance.

The year after her brilliant debut in the novel with *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, Miss Garro gave additional proof of her versatility with a successful volume of eleven short stories, *La semana de colores* (Week of Colors). This collection revealed the

contrast between fantasy and reality, the powerful imagination, and the deep human sympathy that have come to be her trademarks.

Miss Garro's stories and plays have been published in reviews in Mexico as well as abroad, where they have been translated into English, French, German and Swedish. She has traveled extensively throughout Europe and the Far East and has spent considerable time in France.

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