



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1987 Volume I: The Modern Short Story in Latin America

Rosario Ferré: Una cuentista puertorriqueña contemporánea (A Contemporary Puerto Rican Storyteller)

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Introduction

The purpose of this unit is to acquaint the reader with the short story and contemporary writers in Puerto Rico with a special emphasis on Rosario Ferré and her stories.

As part of the unit, a section containing background information is included. The short story in Puerto Rico is and has always been in a state of constant change. Themes, styles, topics, and content change as conditions on the island change. There will be brief descriptions on each of the phases of the short story to be used by teachers as additional reference material. This information will prove valuable in understanding the writer's point of view and the message that he or she wants to get across. The unit should work well with students in Spanish II or above, in the middle or high school levels.

Background Information

The short story in Puerto Rico today as a literary form, like the Puerto Rican people, is the unfinished product of constant change. Its origin can be traced back to its oral tradition, when stories were told and handed down from one generation to another by country and city folks alike. With time, some of these stories were written down, and in 1843 *El aguinaldo puertorriqueño* was published. These first stories reflected the manners and the customs of the Spanish Colonial era. It was the story of the *j'baro* or the humble country peasant; of his view of life and the struggles that accompanied him in his daily existence. This type of writing still influences many writers today and the stories are now an integral part of the Puerto Rican folklore. In 1844, the *Album puertorriqueño* was published and one of its most notable writers was Manuel Alonso. Alonso later wrote *El J'baro*, one of the first native novels.

Other outstanding writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were Manuel Fernández Juncos, Pablo Morales Cabrera, Cayetano Coll y Toste, and Matias González Garc'a. The topics chosen by these writers dealt mainly with traditional folk stories, anecdotes, and supernatural tales which served primarily to entertain the readers. This phase in the Puerto Rican short story is a narration of the *criollo*, those born of Spanish parents in the New World. In the literary world, this phase is known as *Criollism*, in which the *j'baro* is presented with his own garb and language variations. His sufferings and joys are interweaved in the stories, and this trait in particular is still present in contemporary writers although the characters of their stories may

reside in other places; a slum in the city, a dingy apartment in New York, or somewhere within a drug disturbed mind.

Modernism 1910-1928

Following this phase, modernism sets in Puerto Rico somewhat later than in other countries, and lasts from 1910 to 1928, according to Enrique Laguerre. During this time, the short story takes on French airs; it becomes sensuous and more elaborate. There are poetic embellishments and detailed visual descriptions of the Puerto Rican landscapes. This phase of the short story is brief and has very few representative writers, Mar'a Cadilla de Mart'nez and Collado Martell considered the outstanding ones. This period served as a refining stage in writing and prepared the setting for the next phase.

Realism

The thirties reflect an awakening of a national conscience. The writers of this period pondered on the question of what it was to be a Puerto Rican. An identity crisis developed and this problem was discussed in novels, essays, news articles, and in short stories. The issues of culture, ethnicity, poverty, and personal sufferings were presented in the stories with explicit realism. These were written of and about sugar cane workers and coffee reapers, their hardships and the cruel treatment given to them by the plantation owners.

Writers of this phase are Miguel Meléndez Múnoz, Antonio Oliver Frau, Tomás Blanco, and Emilio S. Belaval. This last writer brought into writing new elements; grotesque tones, carnival-like settings, and comic-tragic scenes. These innovations are still being used by modern day writers.

The writers of the thirties were characterized by realism, folklore, social preoccupation, and poetic revalorization of Puerto Rican life as a whole. It was imperative to establish Puerto Rican authenticity in what was being written and not allow outside influences to dominate the content or style of the stories. This was an unsettled time of two forces: the traditional Spanish patterns of 400 years and the political, economic, and cultural infiltration of North America into the island. The result was a breaking from the Spanish literary bonds and a determination not to accept or be dominated the North American pressure.

The Generation or Promotion of the Forties

In the mid-forties, a group of young writers initiated a literary movement which broke away from all previous traditions. Writers of this period include Abelardo D'az Alfaro, José Luis González, René Marqués, Pedro Juan Soto, Edwin Figueroa, José Luis Vivas, Emilio D'az Varcancel, and Salvador M. de Jesús. Their stories reflected the historical reality of Puerto Rico in the forties; the nationalist or independence phenomenon, industrialization and progress myths, life in the city, the participation of Puerto Ricans in the Korean War, mass emigration to New York, and the opposition to the Associated Free State status of Puerto Rico with the United States. It is during this phase of story writing that women are given leading roles in stories, broken also is the traditional role of the woman in Puerto Rican literature. She, now, has control of her actions and her destiny, though her characterization may be unacceptable. The forties marked the unwanted encounter of the traditional patriarchal pattern of life with the North American way of life and beliefs. It was not and still is not accepted as the way of life in Puerto Rico.

Descriptions of the landscape, rural or urban, reflected the mood or state of being of the character, it became a part of him. The stories were about man and his problems, whatever their nature might be. The writers wrote about real people, real situations, but did not pass judgment. They forced the reader to get involved both emotionally and psychologically with the story and characters. It is the reader who, ultimately, is the

judge.

The phase of the Generation of the Forties goes well into the sixties and many of these writers still continue to write excellent stories in the present.

The Sixties

In the mid-sixties another literary movement was initiated by Luis Rafael Sánchez. In his stories, he dealt with the man on the streets of the city and he was the precursor of the renovation movement of the short story in Puerto Rico, which came into full force in the very early seventies. Sánchez situated his stories within the historical reality but broke away from the preceding tendency of psychological or existentialist discourse. The humor in Sánchez' stories ranges from lyrical tenderness to the grotesque, and his use of the Puerto Rican dialect as the means of expression are Sánchez' contributions to Puerto Rican literature.

The Seventies

In 1971, Manuel Ramos Otero published *Concierto de metal para un*

recuerdo y otras orgías de soledad (*Concert of Metal for a Memory and Other Orgies of Solitude*). This book marked the beginning of the present literary phase in Puerto Rico and was the first of the many new books of short stories that quickly followed.

Writers from the fifties' phase were at their height of social realism in Puerto Rico. While this was happening, the rest of the Latin American writers were breaking away from the realist mold with such exponents as Carpentier, Asturias, Rulfo, and Borges.

The seventies in Puerto Rico, historically, were tumultuous. The backlashes of the Cuban Revolution and the Vietnam War; the pro-rights movements of blacks, women, and homosexuals; the political crisis of the Commonwealth and the triumph of the pro-statehood political party; the increased volume of Latin American editorials and publishers, were all factors in the new role of the writers and the stories they were going to write.

As a result of all these forces pressing upon the writers, an endeavor to write with higher standards in language usage and artistic style became the norm among them. The writers of the seventies initiated a phase of renovating literary narration. They reacted to the realist mode in different ways. Some of them continued to use realism in their stories but enriched them with surprising and experimental elements such as "collage" techniques, polyphonic forms and complex space-time concepts. Juan Antonio Ramos, Pedro Juan Soto, and Emilio D'az Varcancel are writers who excelled in these techniques.

Other writers dealt with the socio-realist model critically and magic or fantasy became their means of expression. Many young writers adopted this means of expression; Manuel Ramos Otero, Rosario Ferré, Manuel Abreu Adorno, Edgardo Sanabria Santaliz, Mayra Montero, Tomás Rodr'guez, Carmelo Rodr'guez Torres, and Edgardo Rodr'guez Juliá.

A third group of writers of the seventies reacted still in another way. These writers presented a comic vision of reality by writing in a grotesque, deforming, and caricature-like manner. Writers in this group include Luis Rafael Sánchez, Ana Lydia Vega, Juan Antonio Ramos, and in some instances Rosario Ferré and Manuel Ramos Otero.

The three tendencies; experimental realism, magical-mythical writing, and comical-grotesque writing are used by the writers in their stories in varying degrees. It is not unusual to find in any one writer that she/he has written stories from each of the prevailing tendencies.

New themes and topics are dealt with in the short story of the seventies. New perspectives and points of view about the changing roles of women, blacks, and homosexuals are brought out into the light. There are more women writers presenting the new woman in a contemporary context. Blacks and homosexuals are given a place within the present historical reality. These stories take in characters previously ignored subjects; these characters represent the marginal and unspoken members of society.

The settings of the stories are in the city, on the street, in shops, indoors or outdoors, even apartments in New York are no longer seen as slum dwellings but as melancholic, nostalgic spaces of emigrants. In fact, the setting of the story becomes an integral part of the characters, not a reflection of his condition in society.

The writers of this period have taken the best from their predecessors and have enriched the techniques, language, and substance of the short story today.

Rosario Ferré

Although there are excellent writers and other female writers in the seventies and eighties in Puerto Rico, Rosario Ferré has impressed me greatly with way she presents the role(s) of the woman in Puerto Rican society.

Rosario Ferré says, in *Sitio a Eros*, that she writes to fulfill a need. The need is both constructive and destructive. About writing, she says that, it reveals autobiographical traits of the writer and that it is not important to know about the writer beforehand to be able to understand his/her stories. One may agree or disagree with her on this point. There is little biographical information on Rosario Ferré, in her book of essays; *Sitio a Eros*, she stresses the fact that it is not important to know about her life story, but it is getting to know her through her stories that matters.

Ferré's stories reveal a woman living in changing times. She is changing from the woman-object to the woman-doer, for example, the divorcee. In Ferré's own situation, she had just gotten divorced and initiating a life on her own was painful and difficult. The transition was exasperating and especially lonely; these feelings are experienced by countless women today. As a writer, Ferré had to come face to face with her own reality and decided what was to fulfill her existence. She wanted to live life to the fullest and get her experiences second hand or always be sheltered from danger or dangerous situations. Her most important achievement was to learn not to fear death; but in order to do this, she had to live fully first. It was at this point in her life when she wrote her first story, "La mu-ecca menor" in 1970; a story which will be included in this unit and discussed fully.

Many of her stories deal with the issue of inequality which women of today still struggle with as human beings, particularly in Puerto Rican society. Her heroines, contrary to the main character in *La muñeca menor* who was passive, conformist, and resigned to her sad fate, in her stories today are brave, free willing, strong, and have positive attitudes towards life. Thus, Ferré is revealed in her stories as a rebel, a non-conformist, a woman exploring her feelings and her surroundings; and as a writer who is aggressive, imaginative, and lyrical. Rosario Ferré was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico. She is a writer, poet, and essayist from the seventies. She has written the following:

Papeles de Pandora (1979)- Pandora's Papers

Sitio a Eros (1980)- Siege at Eros

Fabulas de la garza desangrada (1982) Fables of the Bleeding Heron

La mona que le pisaron la cola (1981) The Monkey Who Got Her Tail Stepped On

Los cuentos de Juan Bobo (1981) The Stories of Juan Bobo

“La mu-eca menor”—The Youngest Doll

This story was the first one written by Rosario Ferré. It is a story that is easily read but has a deep and complicated message. In “Sitio a Eros”, Ferré explains the origin of the story but she adds surprising elements into it, which make the story uniquely her own.

After unsuccessful attempts to start writing, Rosario Ferré was convinced that she would never be able to be much of a storyteller, much less a writer of stories. One day, however, while having lunch at an aunt’s house, her aunt told her a story. The story had taken place at the beginning of the twentieth century in a sugar cane plantation, and the main character of her story made dolls which she filled with honey. This woman’s husband was a drunkard and a money spender who, in no time, had used up all of their fortune and lost everything. To top all of this, he threw her out of their home and brought in another woman to live with him.

As was the custom in those days, the unfortunate woman was taken in by close relatives. To show her gratitude, she made dolls for their daughters. Soon after she had arrived at this new home, her right leg became swollen without apparent reason. Her family sent for the town doctor. The doctor was young and wanted to build his own fortune. The woman with the strange illness was also young and quite attractive, so the doctor first courted her and later made a false diagnosis about her leg by saying that there was no cure for her ailment. For twenty years this doctor kept giving medication and therapies but only for his own greed. He used up the money she had been able to salvage from her broken marriage and had converted her into an invalid by telling her there was no cure available for her leg.

The story continued but Ferré’s version of it makes it more than a story told around the coffee table on a warm afternoon. Ferré’s motives in writing the story were to reveal the end of an era and social structures (the sugar cane plantation, its owners and workers), and the substitution of it by another social class; the change of family values to values measured in terms of wealth and personal achievement, which in many cases were materialist and lacking scruples.

Ferré was not happy with the story when she finished it and almost threw it out. However, she put it away for ten years before she published it, but the fact that she had been able to write it at all, started the flow of many other stories that were to follow.

The story “La mu-eca menor” can be summarized as follows:

The aunt is old now and sits on the porch whenever she wanted to make a doll. When she was young she used to bathe in the river, but, once when there had been many days of rain and the river had risen higher than

normal, she was bitten by something in her right leg. The pain was terrible and she had to be carried back to the house.

The doctor came and told her not to worry but as the days passed by there was no improvement on her cut, it would not heal. At the end of a month, the doctor concluded that the river prawn had introduced itself into the skin and had begun to fatten. He then tried to force it out with a heat treatment but that did not work, and the mixture he put on her thigh to heel not only did not do any good but a hard, rocklike substance covered the area where she had been bitten.

Because of her monstrous leg, she withdrew from living. She had always been beautiful and had had many suitors but her condition made her lose her vanity and she sent all her suitors away. She used to spend hours and hours making dolls for her nieces to play with. Every year she would make nine dolls, one for each of her nieces, and each doll would be the size of the girl receiving it. There were so many dolls, a room had to be set aside to store them.

On each of her nieces' wedding day, she would give her a special doll. Unlike the other dolls which were stuffed with wadding, the wedding doll was filled with honey. The doll had a porcelain face and hands, and glass eyes imported from Europe. The old aunt would have someone put the eyes at the bottom of the brook (where she had been bitten) so that they would become sensitive to the movements of river prawns.

Twenty years had passed, and all but the youngest of her nieces had gotten married. On one of his monthly-visits, the doctor came with his son. The young man had also studied medicine and when he saw the old woman's leg he knew at once that her leg could have been cured with the right medication. The father then told him that it had been the money he had been getting from the old woman that had paid for his medical studies. From then on, it was the young doctor who came to visit the elderly aunt and at the same time courted her youngest niece. On their wedding day, the aunt gave her a special doll, more lifelike than any of the other dolls she had ever made. She also set in deep inside each eye a diamond stud earring.

The young wife went to live in the town where her husband had his office. He made her sit in the balcony every day, as to show her off to all who passed by. His ambition and greed were confirmed by her when he took out the diamond earrings from the doll's eyes and pawned them for a costly pocket watch and chain. From then on, the doll's eyelids remained lowered.

A few months later, the doctor noticed that the doll had disappeared. His wife told him that she had sold the porcelain hands and face for a good sum of money to a group of women who were restoring the Virgin at the town church and that the ants had devoured the honey inside the doll in one night. The doctor did not believe her story and dug up the yard surrounding the house to see if he could find any remains of the doll.

Years passed by and the doctor became very rich. He noticed that although he had aged considerably, his wife looked the same as she had when he married her. One night, he went into her room while she slept. He took his stethoscope to listen to her heartbeat but heard nothing. He could hear a faint rush as that of a stream. Then the doll opened her eyes and through the empty holes where the glass eyes had been, the frantic antennas of the river prawns started coming out.

"La mu-eca menor" is found in Rosario Ferrés first book of stories, *Papeles de Pandora*. The second story, "La cucarachita Martina" is one of six folk tales in *La mona que le pisaron la cola*. This story is taken from the oral tradition in Puerto Rican folklore.

“La cucarachita Martina” is about a very clean and tidy cockroach, and it can be summarized as follows;

One day, while sweeping the sidewalk in front of her house, Martina finds a penny. After thinking for a while what she was going to buy with that penny, she decided to buy a penny’s worth of powder. After she bought the powder, she went home, got dressed up in her best outfit, and set on her porch to watch people go by.

Mr. Cat was the first to come by her house, all dressed up because he was going to a wedding. When he saw her so pretty, he went up to her and asked her to marry him. She asked him what he was going to do on their wedding night and he said that he was going to meow and hiss all night, and yell at the top of his lungs that he was the master of the house and that was that! Martina did not like his proposal and told him to leave. Mr. Dog came by second and also asked her to marry him, and so Mr. Rooster. Each of them told her what they would do on their wedding night; the dog scared her and the rooster was going to be making a racket all night, and both declared themselves masters of the house.

The mouse, Ratoncito Pérez, was the last to come by, just when Martina was getting ready to inside the house. He was very courteous and asked her if she cared to go for a walk, she answered that she would rather sit on the porch, so he joined her. After a while, he dared to ask her if she wanted to marry him and she asked him what he planned to do on their wedding night. He told her that he would squeak quietly in her ear and tell her how much he loved her. She liked his approach and told him that she would marry him the next day.

The next day, Martina got up very early to prepare everything for her wedding. She cleaned her house and when she finished her chores, she started cooking a big pot of rice pudding with raisins, molasses, ginger, cinnamon, and coconut milk. While the pudding was cooking, she went to her room to get ready to get married.

Martina did not know that Ratoncito Pérez besides being a gentleman was also very fond of sweets. As soon as Martina left the kitchen, he went in to find out what she was cooking in the pot. Since he could not reach the top of the pot, he stood on a stool and jumped on to the rim of the pot. There he balanced himself while at the same time getting dizzy on the wonderful aroma of the pudding. He wanted to get a taste of the pudding, so he tried to pull out a cinnamon stick from the pot. He tried several times to yank it out but it was in too deep. He lost his balance and fell into the boiling mixture.

When Martina came back in the kitchen to stir the rice pudding, she finds her husband -to-be dead at the bottom of the pot. The sad ending to the story is that after finding the perfect husband she loses him to her own cooking.

Topics to ponder

After reading the two stories, several issues should be discussed in the classroom; the role of women in society, in the home, and in a relationship such as marriage. The stories’ messages are those that affect women directly in past and present generations, and where changes are affecting the larger social structure and traditional female roles are being modified to the woman of today.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan I

Topic The Short Story in Puerto Rico

Objectives

- a. To give students a historical overview of the short story in Puerto Rico.
- b. To study each literary phase and its representative writers and works.
- c. To broaden the students' literary scope outside of the United States.

Activities

- a. Read a story from the *Album puertorrique-o* (1844) or an excerpt from *El J'baro* ; discuss the lifestyle of the country peasant or folk.
- b. Prepare a short presentation on the life and works of any Puerto Rican writer (oral or written exercise).
- c. Prepare a dictionary or words native to Puerto Rico with illustrations.
- d. On a map of Puerto Rico, locate the towns of origin of famous Puerto Rican writers.
- e. Prepare a file on Puerto Rican writers.

Sample card

Ferré, Rosario

Papeles de Pandora (1979)

Sitio a Eros (1980)

La mona que le pisaron la cola (1981)

Los cuentos de Juan Bobo (1981)

Fabulas de la garza desangrada (1982)

Lesson Plan II

Topic “La cucarachita Martina”

Objectives

- a. To read a Puerto Rican folk tale from the oral tradition and retold by Rosario Ferré.
- b. To increase vocabulary in standard and regional Spanish.
- c. To expand verb usage and definition.
- d. To develop translating skills of phrases, sentences, and short paragraphs.
- e. To develop cultural awareness of Puerto Rican folk tales and writers.

Activities

- a. Using a Spanish-English dictionary, the students will define a given list of words before reading the story.
- b. Students will read the story in assigned portions; a portion of the story will be given to a group, they will read and report on their section when group is brought back together.
- c. After reading the story, the students will:
 1. describe in a paragraph Martina, el se-or Perro, el se-or Gato, el se-or Gallo, el Ratoncito Pérez
 2. establish lifestyle patterns of the times—oral discussion
 3. summarize the story in English.
 4. write Martina’s wedding announcement for the *New Haven Register*.
 5. write an obituary for Ratoncito Pérez for the *New Haven Register*.
 6. develop a Spanish-English skit from the story to act—improvisation.

“La cucarachita Martina”-Vocabulary

delantal-apron
moneda-coin
chavito-cent, penny
escoba-broom
siesta-afternoon nap
guayaba-guava fruit
polvo-powder
balcón-porch
balaustres-banisters
bigote-mustache
gesto-gesture
petrimetre-sl. proud
chabacano-vulgar
boda-wedding
bautizo-christening
fiestas patronales-town fair in honor of patron saint
cresta-crest
reverencia-reverence
sonrisa-smile
abanico-fan
fresco-fresh air
olla-pot
fogón-hearth, cooking stove
habitación-room
banquillo-stool
manjar-delicacy
Verbs:
maullar-to meow
aullar-to howl
susurrar-to whisper
cantar-to sing
arrimar-to lean against
barrer-to sweep
asear-to clean
llamar la atención-to attract
brillar-to shine
descubrir-to discover
apoyar-to support
quitar-to take away
dormir-to sleep
seguir-to continue
convenir-to be convenient
correr-to run
ataviarse-to be dressed
atravesar-to cut across
decir-to say

ir(se)-to leave
asustar-to scare
luster-to shine
rascar-to scratch
contester-to answer
alejarse-to leave behind
apartar-to set aside
disimular-to pretend
disponer-to dispose
adornar-to decorate
volver-to return
acomodar-to accommodate
coger-to take
besar-to kiss
levantar(se)-to get up
lavar-to wash
rayar-to grate
exprimir-to wring
sacar-to take out
echar-to put or pour
añadir-to add
colocar-to place
engalanar-to dress up
saber-to know
ser-to be
salir-to leave
subir-to go up
alcanzar-to reach
columpiar(se)-to swing
intentar-to attempt
mover-to move
tirar-to throw
lograr-to achieve
desprender-to loosen
perder-to lose
dar-to hit
revolver-to stir
caer-to fall
comenzar-to begin
mandar-to send
quitar-to take away
vestir-to dress
hushumar-to smell

Lesson Plan III

Topic “La mu-eca menor”

Objectives

- a. To read and discuss a short story written by a contemporary writer.
- b. To analyze the short story “La mu-eca menor” written by Rosario Ferré.
- c. To expand vocabulary in Spanish with special emphasis on verbs.

Activities:

- a. After reading the story silently or for homework, the students will:
 1. make a list of words new to them
 2. look up words and locate the sentence in the story with the word(s) in it
 3. define words not found in the dictionary (regional, dialectical, slang) in groups
- b. Students will be assigned portions of the story to translate and later put together.
- c. Students will discuss female and male roles in society—who can or can’t do what.

Vocabulary

canaveral-cane fields
pantorrilla-calf of the leg
tuétano-marrow
chagara-river prawn
sinapismo-homemade medication
llaga-sore
pétrea-rocklike
gruta-cavity
vanidad-vanity
hermosa-lovely
guanábana-bullock heart(fruit)
guata-wadding
palomar-pigeon-house
palacio-palace

tzarinas-Russian princess
sopor-sleepiness
peones-peons
hacienda-country estate
diligencias-errands
marcarilla-face mask
reluciente-shiny
balcón-porch, balcony
translucida-translucent
quebrada-brook, stream
gemas-gems
tira bordada-lace edging
broder'-embroidered details
zapatillas-slippers
vejiga-bladder
esperma-sperm
estetoscopio-stethoscope
alfiler-pin
erizo-sea urchin
estómago-stomach bistur'-sape
reloj de cebolla-pocket watch
cofradia-reunion
parpados-eyelids
honorarios-fees
encajes-laces
supuración-suppuration
pier-skin
habitación-room
pecho-chest
antena-antenna
Verbs
despertar-to awaken
banar-to bathe
recrecer-to increase
meter-to put in
escuchar-to listen
pensar-to think
sentir-to feel
retorcer-to twist
examinar-to examine
asegurar-to assure
introducir-to introduce
engordar-to fatten
aplicar-to apply
obligar-to place under obligation
finalizar-to finalize

tratar-to try
remover-to remove
enroscar-to wind around
encerrar-to close
dedicar-to dedicate
vivir-to live
adorar-to adore
peinar-to comb
leer-to read
oler-to smell
crec-to grow
pasar-to pass
ocurrir-to occur
explicar-to explain
hacer-to do
separar-to separate
habitar-to inhabit
abrir-to open
entrar-to enter
madurar-to ripen
canturrear-to sing in a low voice
revivir-to revive
cumplir-to have a birthday
clamar-to call out
comprar-to buy
tener-to have
contrastar-to contrast
rebanar-to slice
inclinarse-to lean against
secar-to dry
raspar-to scrape
introducir-to introduce
transigir-to compromise
considerar-to consider
sumergir-to submerge
reconocer-to recognize
casar(se)-to marry
abandonar-to abandon
regalar-to give (presents)
tranquilizar-to calm
levantar-to get up
sostener-to support
notar-to note
rellenar-to fill
acabar-to finish
manar-to spring from

auscultar-to auscultate
curar-to cure
contestar-to answer
visitar-to visit
comenzar-to begin
presentar-to present
caer(se)-to fall
sentar-to sit
entregar-to deliver
decidir-to decide
encontrar-to find
asombrar-to astound
incrustar-to bury
llevar-to carry
sospechar-to suspect
ofrecer-to offer
devorar-to devour
creer-to believe
quebrar-to break
cavar-to dig
acomodar-to accomodate
percibir-to perceive
restregar-to scrub
recordar-to remember
perturbar-to disturb
observar-to observe
levantar-to lift

TEACHERS' ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Ferré, Rosario, *La mona que le pisaron la cola* , Ediciones Huracán, Inc., R'ó Piedras, Puerto Rico, 1981.

This book contains a collection of folk tales taken from the oral tradition. It is nicely illustrated and the story *La Cucarachita Martina* is found in this particular book.

2. ———, *Papeles de Pandora*, Joaqu'n Mortiz, Ed., México, D.F., 1976, 1979.

This is Rosario Ferré's first book of short stories in which "La muñeca menor" first appears.

3. ———, *Sitio a Eros*, Joaqu'n Mortiz, Ed., México, D.F., 1980.

A book of essays on women writers and Ferré's position on writing.

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Addendum 1

Source: Ferré Rosario, *la mona que le pisaron la cola*, Ediciones Huracán, Río Piedras, P.R, 1981

LA CUCARACHITA MARTINA

Había una vez y dos son cuatro, una cucarachita que era muy limpia y que tenía su casa muy aseada. Un día se puso a barrer el balcón y luego siguió barriendo la escalera y luego, con el mismo ímpetu que llevaba, siguió barriendo la acera. De pronto vio algo en el piso que le llamó la atención y se inclinó para recogerlo. Cuando lo tuvo en la palma de la mano vio que era algo muy sucio, pero después de brillarlo y brillarlo con la punta de su delantal, descubrió que era una moneda.

—“¡Ay, pero si es un chavito!”, dijo “¿Qué podré comprarme con un chavito?”

Apoyada en el mango de su escoba pensó y pensó sin ocurrírsele nada hasta que por fin se cansó, guardó la escoba detrás de la puerta, se quitó el delantal y se fue a dormir la siesta. Cuando se despertó, se sentó en el balcón a coger fresco y siguió pensando qué era lo que más le gustaría comprarse con su chavito nuevo.

—“Podría comprarme un chavo de dulce, dijo, pero eso no me conviene, porque en cuanto me lo coma se me acaba. Podría comprarme un chavo de cinta color guayaba para hacerme un lazo . . . pero eso tampoco me conviene, porque cuando me despeine se me acaba. ¡Ay, ya sé, ya sé! Me compraré un chavito de polvo, para que San Antonio me ayude a buscar novio!”. Y dicho y hecho se fue corriendo a la tienda y se compró un chavito de polvo.

Cuando regresó a su casa se atavió con su mejor vestido, se empolvó todita todita y se sentó en el balcón de su casa para ver pasar a la gente.

Al rato atravesó la calle muy elegante el Se-or Gato, vestido todo de negro porque iba camino de unas bodas. Cuando la vio tan bonita el Se-or Gato se acercó al balcón y, recostándose sobre los balaustres, se atusó los bigotes frente a todo el mundo con un gesto muy aristocrático y dijo:

—¡Buenos d'as, Cucarachita Martina! ¡Qué elegante está usted hoy! ¿Le gustar'a casarse conmigo?

—Quizá, contestó la Cucarachita, pero primero tiene usted que decirme cómo hará en nuestra noche de bodas.

—¡Por supuesto, Cucarachita! ¡Eso es muy fácil! En nuestra noche de bod'as yo maullaré ¡MIAOUU, MARRAOUUMAUMIAOUU, MIAOUUMIAOUU! ¡Yo mando aqu' y arroz con melao!

—¡Ay no, por favor, Se-or Gato! ¡Váyase, váyase lejos de aqu'! ¡Eso s' que no, porque me asusta!

Y el Se-or Gato salió corriendo. Cruzó entonces la calle el Se-or Perro muy petrimetre, con su abrigo acabadito de lustrar porque iba camino de un bautizo. Viéndola tan bonita, se arrimó a los balaustres del balcón y se rascó contra ellos varias veces las espaldas. Irguió entonces las orejas con pretensión, como si fuese un perro de casta, y dijo:

—¡Muy buenos d'as, Cucarachita Martina! ¡Pero qué reguapa está usted hoy! ¿Por qué no se casa conmigo?

—Puede ser, le contestó la Cucarachita, pero primero tiene usted que decirme cómo hará en nuestra noche de bodas.

—¡Cómo no Cucarachita! ¡En seguida le ense-o! En nuestra noche de bodas yo aullaré:
¡JAUJAUJAUJAUJAUJAUJAU! ¡Aqu' mando yo y arroz mampostiao!

—¡Ay no, no, por favor, Se-or Perro! Aléjese, aléjese de mi lado. Es usted muy chabacano y además, con tanto ruido me va a despertar a mis hijitos.

Pasó entonces por la calle el Se-or Gallo, muy orondo con su traje de plumas amarillas porque iba camino de unas fiestas patronales. Cuando la vio tan bonita, se acercó al balcón y, moviendo la cresta con arrogancia, sacó pecho en plena calle y dijo:

—¡Buenos d'as, Cucarachita Martina! ¡Pero qué bonita está usted hoy! ¿Por qué no se casa conmigo?

—A lo mejor, le contestó la Cucarachita, pero primero tiene usted que decirme cómo hará en nuestra noche de bodas.

—¡Claro que se lo diré, Cucarachita! ¡Sin ningún problema! En nuestra noche de bodas yo cantaré ¡KIKIRIKIIII, yo mando aqu'ii! ¡KOKOROKOOOO, aqu' mando yooo.

—¡Ay no, no, no, por favor, Se-or Gallo! ¡Apártese, apártese de mi lado! ¡Eso no puede ser! Es usted muy indiscreto, y además, hace tanto ruido que, en la ma-anita, no me dejará dormir!

Y el Se-or Gallo se alejó con la cresta muy alta, disimulando el desaire.

(Figure available in printed form)

“—Te diré muy pasito, ¡Chu', Chu', Chu'! ¡As' te quiero yo a t'!”, le susurró muy discreto el Ratoncito al o'do . . .”

Se estaba haciendo tarde y ya la Cucarachita se dispon'a a entrar de nuevo a su casa, cuando a lo lejos vio venir al Ratoncito Pérez por la calle. Se hab'a vestido con sus mejores galas y en la cabeza llevaba un elegante sombrero de paja adornado con una larga pluma. La Cucarachita se volvió a sentar en el sillón y se

acomodó cuidadosamente los pliegues del vestido. Cuando el Ratoncito Pérez llegó frente a ella, se quitó el sombrero y, haciéndole una profunda reverencia, barrió el piso con su pluma roja.

—“¡Buenos días, Cucarachita Martina! ¡Qué tarde tan agradable hace hoy! ¿No le gustaría salir conmigo a dar un paseo?” La Cucarachita le contestó que muchas gracias, que prefería seguir cogiendo fresco en su balcón, pero que si él quería, podía sentarse a su lado y hacerle compañía. Entonces el Ratoncito Pérez subió con mucha elegancia las escaleras y, cuando estuvo junto a ella, le dijo con mucha crianza:

—Cucarachita Martina, hace tiempo que quería hacerle una pregunta. ¿Le gustaría casarse conmigo?”.

—“A lo mejor”, le contestó la Cucarachita, disimulando una pequeña sonrisa tras el vuelo de su abanico.” Pero primero me tiene usted que decir cómo hará en nuestra noche de bodas.’

“Te diré muy pasito, ¡Chu’, Chu’, Chu’! ¡Así te quiero yo a tí!” le susurró muy discreto el Ratoncito al oído, para que los vecinos no se enteraran. Y ni tonto ni perezoso, le besó respetuosamente la mano.

—¡Ay qué lindo y qué fino! ¡Me gusta como haces, Ratoncito Pérez! Mañana mismo me casaré contigo.

Al otro día la Cucarachita Martina se levantó muy temprano, y se puso a limpiar su casa porque quería que estuviese reluciente el día de la boda. Primero barrió la sala; luego barrió el comedor y las habitaciones; luego barrió el balcón, las escaleras y la acera; y al final dispuso la mesa primorosamente. Después entró a la cocina, porque quería darle una sorpresa al Ratoncito Pérez. Primero lavó el arroz; luego rayó el coco y lo exprimió en un paño fino para sacarle la leche; luego lo echó en la olla y le añadió varios puñados de pasas, un tazón de melao, un poco de jengibre, un poco de agua, varias rajitas de canela y dos cucharadas de manteca. Cuando terminó colocó la olla sobre las tres piedras del fogón y lo puso todo a hervir. Entonces se fue a su cuarto, para engalanarse con su traje de novia.

Pero héte aquí que lo que la Cucarachita Martina no sabía era que el Ratoncito Pérez, además de ser muy fino, era también muy goloso y se la pasaba siempre buscando qué comer. No bien hubo ella salido por la puerta de la cocina, el Ratoncito se acercó al fogón. De la olla salió un perfume delicioso que lo envolvía como en un sueño de gloria, haciéndole la boca agua. Como no podía ver qué era lo que había adentro, arrimó allí un banquillo y, subiéndose de un salto, logró alcanzar el borde de la olla. Comenzó entonces a columpiarse sobre ella de extremo a extremo, intentando descubrir a qué sabía tan succulento manjar. Por fin, alargando la uña de una pata, alcanzó una rajita de canela. “Una sola tiradita y será mía”, se dijo. Tiró una vez, pero la raja estaba bien caliente y se había quedado pegada a la melcocha del arroz. Intentó una segunda vez y la raja se movió un poquito. Tiró con más brío y logró por fin desprenderla, pero mareado por el dulce olor a manjares de bodas, perdió el balance y dio consigo al fondo de la olla.

Un poquito después, la Cucarachita Martina volvió a la cocina a revolver el arroz con su larga cuchara de palo. Cuando vio que el Ratoncito Pérez se había caído en la olla, comenzó a lamentarse desconsolada: “¡Ay, Ratoncito Pérez, pero quién te mandó a meterte en la cocina, a husmear por donde no te importa!”. Como el Ratoncito Pérez nada le contestaba, la Cucarachita se fue a su cuarto, se quitó su traje de novia, se vistió de luto y, sacando su cuatro del ropero, se sentó a la puerta de su casa y se puso a cantar:

Ratoncito Pérez cayó en la olla,

Cucarachita Martina lo canta y lo llora,

¡Lo canta y lo llora!

¡Lo canta y lo llora!

Addendum 2

Source: Ferré Rosario, *Papeles de Pandora*, Joaquín Mortiz, México, D.F., 1976

LA MUJER MENOR

La tía vieja había sacado desde muy temprano el sillón al balcón que daba al ca-averl como hacía siempre que se desesperaba con ganas de hacer una mu-eca. De joven se ba-aba menudo en el río, pero un día en que la lluvia había recrecido la corriente en cola de dragón había sentido en el tuétano de los huesos una mullida sensación de nieve. La cabeza metida en el reverbero negro de las rocas, había creído escuchar, revolcados con el sonido del agua, los estallidos del salitre sobre la playa y pensó que sus cabellos habían llegado por fin a desembocar en el mar. En ese preciso momento sintió una mordida terrible en la pantorrilla. La sacaron del agua gritando y se la llevaron a la casa en parihuelas retorciéndose de dolor.

El médico que la examinó aseguró que no era nada, probablemente había sido mordida por una chágara viciosa. Sin embargo pasaron los días y la llaga no cejaba. Al cabo de un mes el médico había llegado a la conclusión de que la chágara se había introducido dentro de la carne blanda de la pantorrilla, donde había evidentemente comenzado a engordar. Indicó que le aplicaran un sinapismo para que el calor la obligara a salir. La tía estuvo una semana con la pierna rígida, cubierta de mostaza desde el tobillo hasta el muslo, pero al finalizar el tratamiento se descubrió que la llaga se había abultado aún más, recubriéndose de una sustancia pétrea y limosa que era imposible tratar de remover sin que peligrara toda la pierna. Entonces se resignó a vivir para siempre con la chágara enroscada dentro de la gruta de su pantorrilla.

Había sido muy hermosa, pero la chágara que escondía bajo los largos pliegues de gasa de sus faldas la había despojado de toda vanidad. Se había encerrado en la casa rehusando a todos sus pretendientes. Al principio se había dedicado a la crianza de las hijas de su hermana, arrastrando por toda la casa la pierna monstruosa con bastante agilidad. Por aquella época la familia vivía rodeada de un pasado que dejaba desintegrar a su alrededor con la misma impasible musicalidad con que la lámpara de cristal del comedor se desgranaba a pedazos sobre el mantel raído de la mesa. Las niñas adoraban a la tía. Ella las peinaba, las ba-aba y les daba de comer. Cuando les leía cuentos se sentaban a su alrededor y levantaban con disimulo el volante almidonado de su falda para oler el perfume de guanábana madura que supuraba la pierna en estado de quietud.

Cuando las niñas fueron creciendo la tía se dedicó a hacerles mu-ecas para jugar. Al principio eran sólo mu-ecas comunes, con carne de guata de higüera y ojos de botones perdidos. Pero con el pasar del tiempo fue refinando su arte hasta ganarse el respeto y la reverencia de toda la familia. El nacimiento de una mu-eca era siempre motivo de regocijo sagrado, lo cual explicaba el que jamás se les hubiese ocurrido vender una de ellas, ni siquiera cuando las niñas eran ya grandes y la familia comenzaba a pasar necesidad. La tía había ido agrandando el tamaño de las mu-ecas de manera que correspondieran a la estatura y a las medidas de cada una de las niñas. Como eran nueve y la tía hacía una mu-eca de cada niña por año, hubo que separar una pieza de la casa para que la habitasen exclusivamente las mu-ecas. Cuando la mayor cumplió diez y ocho años había ciento veintiséis mu-ecas de todas las edades en la habitación. Al abrir la puerta, daba la sensación de entrar en un palomar, o en el cuarto de mu-ecas del palacio de las tzarinas, o en un almacén

donde alguien hab'ía puesto a madurar una larga hilera de hojas de tabaco. Sin embargo, la t'ía no entraba en la habitación por ninguno de estos placeres, sino que echaba el pestillo a la puerta e iba levantando amorosamente cada una de las mu-ecas canturreándoles mientras las mec'ía: As' eras cuando ten'as un a-o, as' cuando ten'as dos, as' cuando ten'as tres, reviviendo la vida de cada una de ellas por la dimensión del hueco que le dejaban entre los brazos.

El d'ía que la mayor de las ni-as cumplió diez a-os, la t'ía se sentó en el sillón frente al ca-averal y no se volvió a levantar jamás. Se balcaneaba d'ías enteros observando los cambios de agua de las ca-as y sólo sal'ía de su sopor cuando la ven'ía a visitar el doctor o cuando se despertaba con ganas de hacer una mu-eca. Comenzaba entonces a clamar para que todos los habitantes de la casa viniesen a ayudarla. Pod'ía verse ese d'ía a los peones de la hacienda haciendo constantes relevos al pueblo como alegres mensajeros incas, a comprar cera, a comprar barro de porcelana, encajes, agujas, carretes de hilos de todos los colores. Mientras se llevaban a cabo estas diligencias, la t'ía llamaba a su habitación a la ni-a con la que hab'ía so-ado esa noche y le tomaba las medidas. Luego le hac'ía una mascarilla de cera que cubr'ía de yeso por ambos lados como una cara viva dentro de dos caras muertas; luego hac'ía salir un hilillo rubio interminable por un hoyito en la barbilla. La porcelana de las manos era siempre translúcida; ten'ía un ligero tinte marfile-o que contrastaba con la blancura granulada de las caras de biscuit. Para hacer el cuerpo, la t'ía enviaba al jard'n por veinte higüeras relucientes. Las cog'ía con una mano y con un movimiento experto de la cuchilla las iba rebanando una a una en cráneos relucientes de cuero verde. Luego las inclinaba en hilera contra la pared del balcón, para que el sol y el aire secaran los cerebros algodonosos de guano gris. Al cabo de algunos d'ías raspaba el contenido con una cuchara y lo iba introduciendo con infinita paciencia por la boca de la mu-eca.

Lo único que la t'ía transig'ía en utilizar en la creación de las mu-ecas sin que estuviese hecho por ella, eran las bolas de los ojos. Se los enviaban por correo desde Europa en todos los colores, pero la t'ía los consideraba inservibles hasta no haberlos dejado sumergidos durante un número de d'ías en el fondo de la quebrada para que aprendiesen a reconocer el más leve movimiento de las antenas de las chágaras. Sólo entonces los lavaba con agua de amoníaco y los guardaba, relucientes como gemas, colocados sobre camas de algodón, en el fondo de una lata de galletas holandesas. El vestido de las mu-ecas no variaba nunca, a pesar de que las ni-as iban creciendo. Vest'ía siempre a las más peque-as de tira bordada y a las mayores de broder', colocando en la cabeza de cada una el mismo lazo abullonado y trémulo de pecho de paloma.

Las ni-as empezaron a casarse y a abandonar la casa. El d'ía de la boda la t'ía les regalaba a cada una la última mu-eca dándoles un beso en la frente y diciéndoles con una sonrisa: "Aqu' tienes tu Pascua de Resurrección." A los novios los tranquilizaba asegurándoles que la mu-eca era sólo una decoración sentimental que sol'ía colocarse sentada, en las casas de antes, sobre la cola del piano. Desde lo alto del balcón la t'ía observaba a las ni-as bajar por última vez las escaleras de la casa sosteniendo en una mano la modesta maleta a cuadros de cartón y pasando el otro brazo alrededor de la cintura de aquella exuberante mu-eca hecha a su imagen y semejanza, calzada con zapatillas de ante, faldas de bordados nevados y pantaletas de valencienes. Las manos y la cara de estas mu-ecas, sin embargo, se notaban menos transparentes, ten'an la consistencia de la leche cortada. Esta diferencia encubr'ía otra más sutil: la mu-eca de boda no estaba jamás rellena de guata, sino de miel.

Ya se hab'an casado todas las ni-as y en la casa quedaba sólo la más joven cuando el doctor hizo a la t'ía la visita mensual acompa-ado de su hijo que acababa de regresar de sus estudios de medicina en el norte. El joven levantó el volante de la falda almidonada y se quedó mirando aquella inmensa vejiga abotagada que manaba una esperma perfumada por la punta de sus escamas verdes. Sacó su estetoscopio y la auscultó, cuidadosamente. La t'ía pensó que auscultaba la respiración de la chágara para verificar si todav'ía estaba

viva, y cogiéndole la mano con cariño se la puso sobre un lugar determinado para que palpara el movimiento constante de las antenas. El joven dejó caer la falda y miró fijamente al padre. Usted hubiese podido haber curado esto en sus comienzos, le dijo. Es cierto, contestó el padre, pero yo sólo quería que vinieras a ver la chágara que te había pagado los estudios durante veinte años.

En adelante fue el joven médico quien visitó mensualmente a la tía vieja. Era evidente su interés por la menor y la tía pudo comenzar su última muerte con amplia anticipación. Se presentaba siempre con el cuello almidonado, los zapatos brillantes y el ostentoso alfiler de corbata oriental del que no tiene donde caerse muerto. Luego de examinar a la tía se sentaba en la sala recostando su silueta de papel dentro de un marco ovalado, a la vez que le entregaba a la menor el mismo ramo de siemprevivas moradas. Ella le ofrecía galletitas de jengibre y cogía el ramo quisquillosamente con la punta de los dedos como quien coge el estómago de un erizo vuelto al revés. Decidió casarse con él porque le intrigaba su perfil dormido, y porque ya tenía ganas de saber cómo era por dentro la carne de delfín.

El día de la boda la menor se sorprendió al coger la muerte por la cintura y encontrarla tibia, pero lo olvidó en seguida, asombrada ante su excelencia artística. Las manos y la cara estaban confeccionadas con delicadísima porcelana de Mikado. Reconoció en la sonrisa entreabierta y un poco triste la colección completa de sus dientes de leche. Había, además, otro detalle particular: la tía había incrustado en el fondo de las pupilas de los ojos sus dormilonas de brillantes.

El joven médico se la llevó a vivir al pueblo, a una casa encuadrada dentro de un bloque de cemento. La obligaba todos los días a sentarse en el balcón, para que los que pasaban por la calle supiesen que él se había casado en sociedad. Inmóvil dentro de su cubo de calor, la menor comenzó a sospechar que su marido no sólo tenía el perfil de silueta de papel sino también el alma. Confirmó sus sospechas al poco tiempo. Un día él le sacó los ojos a la muerte con la punta del bisturí y los empujó por un lujoso reloj de cebolla con una larga leontina. Desde entonces la muerte siguió sentada sobre la cola del piano, pero con los ojos bajos.

A los pocos meses el joven médico notó la ausencia de la muerte y le preguntó a la menor qué había hecho con ella. Una cofradía de señoras piadosas le había ofrecido una buena suma por la cara y las manos de porcelana para hacerle un retablo a la Verónica en la próxima procesión de Cuaresma. La menor le contestó que las hormigas habían descubierto por fin que la muerte estaba rellena de miel y en una sola noche se la habían devorado. "Como las manos y la cara eran de porcelana de Mikado, dijo, seguramente las hormigas las creyeron hechas de azúcar, y en este preciso momento deben de estar quebrándose los dientes, royendo con furia dedos y párpados en alguna cueva subterránea." Esa noche el médico cavó toda la tierra alrededor de la casa sin encontrar nada.

Pasaron los años y el médico se hizo millonario. Se había quedado con toda la clientela del pueblo, a quienes no les importaba pagar honorarios exorbitantes para poder ver de cerca a un miembro legítimo de la extinta aristocracia caía. La menor seguía sentada en el balcón, inmóvil dentro de sus gasas y encajes, siempre con los ojos bajos. Cuando los pacientes de su marido, colgados de collares, plumachos y bastones, se acomodaban cerca de ella removiendo los rollos de sus carnes satisfechas con un alboroto de monedas, percibían a su alrededor un perfume particular que les hacía recordar involuntariamente la lenta supuración de una guanábana. Entonces les entraban a todas unas ganas irresistibles de restregarse las manos como si fueran patas.

Una sola cosa perturbaba la felicidad del médico. Notaba que mientras él se iba poniendo viejo, la menor guardaba la misma piel aporcelanada y dura que tenía cuando la iba a visitar a la casa del caía. Una noche decidió entrar en su habitación para observarla durmiendo. Notó que su pecho no se movía. Colocó

delicadamente el estetoscopio sobre su corazón y oyó un lejano rumor de agua. Entonces la muñeca levantó los párpados y por las cuencas vacías de los ojos comenzaron a salir las antenas furibundas de las chágaras.

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