"Lamentación de Dido": Rosario Castellanos’ Quest for a Feminine Voice.

by

Alicia Flores de Ulysses
B.A., University of Victoria, 1991

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Hispanic and Italian Studies

©Alicia Flores de Ulysses, 2005
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.
Supervisor: Dr. Pablo Restrepo-Gautier

ABSTRACT

This study undertakes an analysis of Rosario Castellanos’ 1953 feminist poem “Lamentación de Dido”. It takes into account the influence of Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf and Simone Weil, the classical foreground of Virgil and Homer, and the relations of the poem to Luis de Góngora’s cultismo. In “Lamentación”, Castellanos attempts to create a public feminist discourse in a time and space where women were supposed to remain in the domestic-private sphere. An in-depth analysis of “Lamentación” shows that for Castellanos the issues of race and gender were tightly intertwined. For Castellanos, the creation of a discourse that could change the extreme discrimination suffered by women and the indigenous people of Mexico became a life-long quest.
Table of Contents.

Abstract. ii
Table of Contents. iii
Acknowledgements. iv
Dedication. v
Introduction. 1
Chapter I. Rosario Castellanos: A Writer Born from Destiny. 5
Chapter II. Rosario Castellanos’ Social Context and Feminist Trajectory. 21
Chapter III. “Lamentación de Dido”: A contemporary View of a Timeless Poem. 42
Conclusion 109
Bibliography. 112
Apendix. 121
Acknowledgments.

First, I would like to thank Dr. Judith Payne who, after listening to my personal interest on Mexican Indigenist issues, recommended that I read this wonderful Mexican writer called Rosario Castellanos. Second, I would like to deeply thank Don Cal, whom I met while taking a course on Dante’s Divine Comedy, for being such a patient, caring and compassionate listener. I thank Don for his suggestion to study Dido as one of the four female archetypes, Hecuba, Dido, Judith and Salome, that Rosario Castellanos uses in her feminist poems. Third, I would like to thank Dr. Lloyd Howard who, as the chair of the Department of Hispanic and Italian Studies, gave me his unconditional support by writing numerous letters on my behalf, and who never gave up on me. Fourth, I would like to thank Dr. Elena Rossi for her knowledge, wisdom and encouragement throughout the beginning and almost completion of this thesis. I would like to thank her for the countless hours she put towards the revision of the translation of the poem and her unselfish and very professional advice. Finally, I would like to thank deeply Dr. Pablo Restrepo-Gautier for being such an inspiring professor. I will forever be grateful for his willingness to tirelessly and unselfishly work with me towards the achievement of my goal, for his constructive, positive criticism, and his compassionate approach as an intellectual mentor. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Gregory Andrachuk who, back in 1986 as the chair of the Department, sent me to take my first university literature course with Dr. Rossi. By doing so, he set me into the path I have taken.......

Thank you all.
Dedication.

I dedicate this thesis to my father who taught me the gift of never forgetting about the underprivileged, and to my mother who, as a Mexican woman, knew what it was like to be part of the underprivileged. I hope, with this study, to honour both their memories and their ideals.

I also would like to thank and dedicate this accomplishment to my husband Leon, my daughter Monique and my son Nicholas, who throughout the past seven years have been my support and my shelter.

Finally, to Guillermina.
Introduction.

Mujer siempre, y hasta el fin, que con el pie
de la sagrada peregrinación
sube-arrancando la oscura cauda de su memoria
always woman, and until the end, who with the same step
of sacred peregrination
climbs-dragging the dark trove of her memory

When Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974) wrote these lines in one of her most famous poems “Lamentación de Dido” (1953-1955), she had realized that in order to understand the current status of Mexican women - and therefore that of herself - she needed to first find out where she came from. With the creation of a Mexican Dido derived from Virgil’s Dido of the Aeneid, Castellanos blends the cultural and literary Western tradition with Mexico’s own indigenous origins, thus creating “Lamentación,” a mestizo\(^1\) poem which represents the complexities of her own culture. In addition, with

---

\(^1\) “In the sixteenth century, the term *mestizo* referred to the illegitimate offspring of Europeans and natives who were not raised in their respective communities either as ‘Spaniards’ or as ‘Indians’. By the seventeenth century, *mestizo* was used to identify Euro-Indians and acculturated natives in the lower socio-economic levels of Mexican society” (MacLachlan 200).
“Lamentación”, Castellanos brings women’s private worlds into the limelight of public scrutiny. Given that in 1957 the expression of Mexican women’s preoccupations was almost non-existent in public discourse, by challenging the idiosyncrasies of race, gender and class, Castellanos earns a reputation as a true pioneer of Mexican feminism.

Three main elements make up Castellanos’ feminist thought at the time of the publication of “Lamentación”: first, the influence of Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), Simone Weil (1909-1943), and Virginia Woolf (1882-1941); second, the re-telling of the story of Virgil’s Dido from a feminist perspective; and third, the experience of Mexican women. This study will establish that Castellanos forges a new Mexican feminist discourse by blending all these three elements. Castellanos amalgamates Mexican and foreign traditions in a quest for the universal\(^2\) in order to take her poetry beyond the cultural boundaries of her native Mexico. By borrowing the story of Virgil’s female archetype, and changing Dido’s character from a victim of unrequited love into a woman aware of her destiny, her limitations, and her choices, Castellanos condemns the traditional idea of woman while creating a new forum for social criticism.

Ironically, Castellanos’ life reveals personal tragedies that could easily characterize her as a victim, partly due to her gender. Since her poetry has a strong

---

As of 1984 when Alan Riding wrote *Distant Neighbors: A Portrait of the Mexicans*, 90% of the Mexican population was *mestizo* 3.

\(^{2}\) As Jean Franco explains in her book *Decadencia y caída de la ciudad letrada: La literatura latinoamericana durante la guerra fría*, the literary canon defined “lo universal, como los valores occidentales” 11.
autobiographical element, a careful study must consider how her personal story influences her and to what degree this story shapes the feminist perspective of her early poetry. The most recent and significant studies on Castellanos tend to imbed in their analysis anachronistic views. As Joanna O'Connell notes in *Prospero's Daughter: The Prose of Rosario Castellanos* when talking about Castellanos' *Sobre cultura femenina* (1950):

> At times her splendid irony leaves no doubt that she rejects the misogynist categories she examines, while others, her status as a student and her own internalization of misogynist discourse seem to sweep away her confidence; she appears to accept without question the very concepts she mocks elsewhere (28-29). [...] Indeed, in part of her essay she seems to accept the definitions of “feminine” and “culture” as handed down to her by a virulent misogynist philosophical tradition. (29)

In order to understand why some of these Western critics believe Castellanos submissively accepts her feminine role within the patriarchal literary canon, it is necessary to analyze the Mexico that Castellanos tried to represent in “Lamentación”. This study will help place Castellanos within her rightful historical and socio-political context, and will connect her life experiences and her social context to her early poetry, especially, “Lamentación”. Finally, the study will show how Castellanos’ poem helped shape the notions of women and the reactions towards them in mid 20th-century Mexico. Today, Castellanos is a highly recognized feminist Mexican figure whose life must continue to be studied by women who, like herself, want to trace their cultural footsteps
in order to understand their present lives and thus their own status in today’s Mexican society.

This thesis examines the objectives outlined in the previous paragraphs in three chapters. Chapter One explores how some of Castellanos’ personal tragedies and experiences influenced her life and works. Chapter Two explores the author’s social context and outlines her feminist trajectory. Finally, Chapter Three focuses on the forging of Castellanos’ feminist discourse in “Lamentación”.
Chapter I.

Rosario Castellanos: A Writer Born from Destiny.

Rosario Castellanos was born in Mexico City on the 25th of May 1925. She spent her childhood in her parents’ native Comitán, today San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. There, from an early age, she saw herself as part of a patriarchal ladino3 society where white males ruled unquestionably over women and indigenous people. As Joanna O’Connell suggests:

Their local domination was built on the exploitation of indigenous labor and buttressed by a racist ideology that dictated the cultural and racial superiority of their class. This elite’s local power was not seriously disturbed by Independence, although some left Mexico for Guatemala, but it was challenged by the Mexican Revolution and by the consolidation of the state’s control over the provinces. (14)

Although Castellanos saw herself as part of this hegemony, she never truly felt that she belonged in her father’s authoritarian world. To understand this feeling of exclusion which was reflected in Castellanos’ works, it is necessary to appreciate the life experiences that shaped her character, her need for self expression, her social and political passions.

A closer look at Castellanos’ life and work reveals how she strove to survive her own destiny. As a young girl, the constraints in her restrictive, monotonous and solitary

---

3 *Ladino / ladina* is a term used in the Mexican South for whites and *mestizos*. 
world became apparent to her. First of all, as the daughter of a ladino family, her close contact with the indigenous women who took care of her as a child, her nana or “nurse”, Rufina, and her cargadora or “carrier”, María Escandón, an indigenous girl barely Rosario’s own age (Meditación 15), made her aware of the existence of “the other”, a notion that Castellanos learned and internalized from a very young age through the eyes and oral traditions of these native women.

Castellanos honoured the indigenous people of her childhood in her novels Balín Canán and Oficio de Tinieblas. The role of the nana in both narratives becomes pivotal in the final outcome in a semi-mythical ending in both books, while the use of Mayan epigraphs from El libro del consejo shows Castellanos’ respect for the cultures of “the other”.

Secondly, and most importantly, her brother Benjamín’s death when she was seven years old, left her an only child, and not necessarily the preferred one. Rosario told on numerous occasions the story of how her mother, who used to visit a medium, found out about the imminent death of one of her children. ⁴ In Rosario’s presence, the mother

⁴ Rosario Castellanos herself used to tell the story of how her brother’s death affected her for life. It is explained by Elena Poniatowska in the prologue of Meditación en el umbral:

“Mi mamá se dedicó a hacer jueguitos de espiritismo con una amiga suya. En uno de esos juegos la amiga tuvo una revelación que recuerdo muy vivamente, a pesar de mis ocho años, porque fue para mí determinante. Estábamos descansando en el comedor, mi hermano de siete años, mi mamá y yo cuando entró despavorida esta amiga, con el pelo blanco todo parado y sin peinar, como una especie de medusa, y le dijo a mi mamá que
screamed in horror “Please, not the boy!” Castellanos, as a result, secretly wished for her brother’s death. When he actually died of a mistreated appendicitis, she blamed herself. In their grief, her parents honored the brother’s memory by negating the daughter’s existence. César Castellanos preferred to read storybooks by Benjamín’s tomb than to read them to the daughter left behind (Meditación 16). In her loneliness Castellanos acababa de aparecersele un espíritu que le avisó que uno de sus dos hijos iba a morir. Entonces mi mamá se levantó como resorte y gritó: ‘Pero no el varón, ¿verdad?’”

Este grito lo escucharía Rosario a lo largo de su vida, porque Rosario deseó la muerte de Benjamín- a quien llamó Mario en su novela Balún Canán – y cuando murió (de una appendicitis mal atendida) la niña se sintió culpable.

“My mum dedicated herself to these silly games of spiritualism with a friend of hers. In one of those games, her friend had a revelation which I remember vividly, despite being just eight years old, because to me, it became a determining moment. We were resting in the dining room, my seven-year-old brother, my mum and I when this friend entered the room utterly terrified, with her white hair standing up and uncombed, sort of a ‘medusa’, and she told my mum that a spirit had just appeared in front of her to warn her that one of my mum’s children was going to die. Then, my mum stood up like a spring and screamed: ‘Please, not the boy!’”

This shriek Rosario would hear throughout her life because Rosario wished for her brother Benjamín’s death- whom she called Mario in her novel Balún Canán – and when he died (of a badly treated appendicitis) the girl felt guilty.” 16.
passed her time reading books. With nobody to talk to, Castellanos became an observer of her own life as well as of the women around her, as she expressed it herself:

Mi experiencia más remota radicó en la soledad individual; muy pronto descubrí que en la misma condición se encontraban todas las mujeres a las que conocía: solas solteras, solas casadas, solas madres. Solas en un pueblo que no mantenía contacto con los demás. Solas, soportando unas costumbres muy rígidas que condenaban el amor y la entrega como un pecado sin redención. Solas en el ocio porque ése era el único lujo que su dinero sabía comprar. Retratar esas vidas, delinear esas figuras, forma un proceso que conserva una trayectoria autobiográfica.

My most remote experience resides in individual solitude; very soon I discovered that all the women I knew were in the same state of loneliness: lonely spinsters, lonely wives, lonely mothers. Alone in a town which did not keep contact with outsiders. Alone, bearing very rigid customs that condemned love and surrender as a sin. Alone in idleness, because that was the only luxury their money could buy. To portray those lives, to outline those figures, creates a process that maintains an autobiographical trajectory. (Meditación 17)

This sense of loneliness was not limited to her childhood and adolescence; it would hunt Castellanos sporadically throughout her adult life. A bout of tuberculosis in 1952 forced Castellanos to spend three months in the San Ángel hospital and another full year in convalescence at home in Mexico City (Seale 22). Even as a mature woman she
continued to succumb to the feelings of sadness and alienation. She expressed it clearly to her husband in a letter from Riverside, New York, in December 1966:

En cuanto a mí, estoy haciendo un gran esfuerzo para funcionar, pero tengo una sensación tan aguda de inexistencia, de muerte, de que he sido definitivamente mutilada de lo que era mi sustento y de que me estoy convirtiendo en algo que todavía no sé qué es pero será infinitamente más pobre y más triste de lo que era antes. En fin, las medicinas me deprimen muchísimo y prefiero la angustia y la náusea. Es inútil que yo vea nada y vaya a donde vaya, nada me interesa, nada me distrae, no salgo de ese pozo negro donde caí hace mucho tiempo.

As for me, I’m making a big effort to function, but I have a deep sense of nonexistence, of death, that I have been mutilated from what was my livelihood and that I am turning into something that I still don’t know what it is, but it will be infinitely poorer and sadder than what it was before. Anyway, medications depress me enormously and I prefer anguish and nausea. It’s useless that I see things, that I go places, nothing interests me, nothing distracts me, I can’t come out of this black well I fell into so long ago. (Cartas 230)

However, not everything was bleak in Castellanos’ life. In spite all her personal agonies, she achieved publicly all the recognition that she denied herself privately. Indeed, as an adult she was honoured with prestigious awards such as the Premio Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1962), the Premio Carlos Trouyet de Letras (1967), and the Premio Elias Sourasky de Letras (1972). She taught at the National Autonomous
University of Mexico (UNAM) in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters from 1962 to 1974, and acted as visiting professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1966, and Indiana University, Bloomington, in 1967. She wrote numerous articles for the respected political journal ¡Siempre! and the newspaper El Universal. Unfortunately, she died while serving as Mexican ambassador to Israel, electrocuted by a lamp in her hotel room the 7th of August, 1974, in the prime years of her political and social activism. Ironically Castellanos had finally achieved the kind of egalitarian recognition that she most famously fought for as a literary “monster”, as she often called herself and as Joanna O’Connell testifies when comparing Castellanos with Miranda, from Shakespeare’s The Tempest:

…the dilemma for Castellanos in Sobre cultura femenina is that to speak as a woman intellectual means an oscillation between speaking as Miranda, the dutiful daughter of the ruling class whose role it is to act as

---

5 One example of her own characterization as a “literary monster” can be found in a letter Castellanos wrote to Ricardo Guerra on the 22nd of December, 1951 from Chapatengo, Chiapas. Cartas a Ricardo. 177-178. This characterization might also refer to Cervantes’ famous line about Lope de Vega in his “Prólogo al lector”: “Tuve otras cosas en que ocuparme; dejé la pluma y las comedias, y entró luego el mostruo de naturaleza, el gran Lope de Vega, y alzóse con la monarquía cómica.” Comedia y Entremeses, Obras Completas, Tomo I, Cervantes de Saavedra, Miguel, Aguilar: España, 1975, 210.

6 Rosario Castellanos wrote Sobre cultura femenina in 1950.
the bearer of Prospero’s word, or as a female monster, a ‘sea serpent’ or a ‘morbid nightmare.’ (28)

Talking specifically about Castellanos’ early attempts at understanding her position as an intellectual, O’Connell states:

...there was for her no culturally or historically sanctioned place from which to speak as a female producer of culture within the terms of European philosophy. Instead, the figures available for her to image herself as an intellectual woman are images of impossibility and monstrosity [and she quotes Castellanos’ *Sobre cultura femenina*: la imposibilidad absoluta de que mosntruos tan extraordinarios como las serpientes marinas y las mujeres cultas o creadoras de cultura, sean algo más que una alucinación, un espejismo, una morbosa pesadilla (the absolute impossibility that monsters as extraordinary as sea serpents or learned women, women who create culture, could be more than a hallucination, a mirage, a morbid nightmare). (28)

Ironically, in spite of such a self-deprecating image which stayed with her until the day she died, Castellanos achieved her goal: the creation of a female public discourse that would question Mexican women’s status within a society that continuously looked with expectation towards a modern future while lamenting with sorrow its tormented past.

To be able to understand where Castellanos got this impassionate desire for change, it is necessary to look at the social context in which she lived. Rosario Castellanos believed that
Los mitos norman la vida de los pueblos. Intervienen en la conformación de su realidad y sirven de clave para interpretar los acontecimientos históricos. El mito no sólo recoge elementos de la experiencia del pasado y los ordena de acuerdo con ciertas categorías mentales, sino que prefigura el porvenir y lo provoca. El profeta, al hablar de lo que vendrá, está tratando de determinar los hechos, de moldearlos adaptándolos a los más secretos y constantes anhelos y modos de ser de su raza.

Myths rule peoples’ lives. They intervene in the conformation of their reality and serve as interpreters of their historical events. Myths not only harvest elements from past experiences, they also arrange them according to certain mental categories that shape and create peoples’ destiny. The prophet, when talking about what will come, is trying to determine the facts, to mold them, adapting them to the most secret and constant aspirations and customs of his own race. (Declaración 40)

Castellanos is referring here to the pre-Columbian foreboding beliefs that imbedded in the Mexican psyche expectations of future catastrophes to come, which in many ways set the stage for the Spanish Conquest of Mexico (Declaración 43). However, in the history of modern Mexican political culture, there has not been a more sacred myth than the one that forged and maintained the ruling machine of the “institutionalized Mexican Revolution”. It was exactly within this political atmosphere that Rosario Castellanos was born.
Although in 1925, when Castellanos was born, Mexico was still ruled by the revolutionary “caudillos”\(^7\), it was the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas from 1934 to 1940 that provided modern Mexico with the stability that it needed in order to become and be recognized in the international arena as a nation. It is true that Castellanos’ socialist evolution occurred after Cárdenas presidency; however, she gave total credit for her achievements as a woman and as a writer to Cárdenas. As Castellanos acknowledges in her celebrated essay honouring Cárdenas “El hombre del destino” (1970):

¿Qué iba a ser de mí? Antes de Cárdenas no hubiese habido ninguna duda. En la infancia yo habría asistido a la casa de la “amiga” para que me enseñara los rudimentos del alfabeto y las cuatro operaciones aritméticas y para cuando observara los primeros signos de la pubertad se apresurase a ordenarme el dibujo a colores de un mapamundi en un pliego de papel cartoncillo y me diera el título de señorita. (El uso 233)

What was to become of me? Before Cárdenas there would never have been a doubt. As a child I would have gone to school in a “lady’s” home to learn the rudiments of the alphabet and basic arithmetic steps. When the first signs of puberty were noticed, a colored map of the world on a sheet of cardboard would be hurriedly ordered and I would be addressed as young lady.\(^8\)

\(^7\) Caudillo: “El que, como cabeza, guía o manda a la gente de guerra. El que dirige algún gremio, comunidad o cuerpo. Commander, chief, leader.

\(^8\) Translated by Maureen Ahern, A Rosario Castellanos Reader. 233-235.
Castellanos explains how after Cárdenas many landowners felt forced to send their female offspring to school. Young ladies could no longer stay at home in wait of marriage:

Quizá yo iba a verme obligada, ¡abominación de abominaciones!, a trabajar y por más que nos pesara a todos más valía irse preparando: estudiar una carrera útil, pero que no deteriorara excesivamente mi feminidad. ¿Secretaria? ¿Química? En fin algo que me permitiera ganarme la vida sin darme fama de marisabidilla porque eso ni el más abnegado de mis primos, ni el más esnob de los arribistas –a los que Cárdenas les dio alas- me lo iba a perdonar. En efecto no me lo perdonaron. Y a la hora de hacer un balance entre las dos formas de vida… yo no sabría decir cuál hubiera sido la más feliz,… Pero sí sé que la que tuve fue la más responsable, la más plena y la más humana. Y sé también a quién tengo que agradecérselo. (El Uso 235)

Perhaps (Oh dreadful fate!), I was going to have to work, and in spite of how bad we felt about it, it was better to start studying something useful, but something that did not excessively detract from my femininity. Secretarial work? Chemistry? At any rate something that would enable me to earn my living without acquiring the reputation of a know-it-all because not even the most self-sacrificing of my cousins or the snobbiest of the social climbers-to whom Cárdenas gave wings- would pardon me for that. And, quite definitely, they never did. Now when I weigh the two kinds of lives… I couldn’t say which would have been the happiest…. But I do
know that the one I had was the most responsible, the fullest, and the most human. And I also know that I have him to thank for it.⁹

As well as starting the so-called Agrarian Reform that created the unique peasant land-ownership through what was called ejido,¹⁰ Cárdenas should also be credited with bringing for the first time since the Revolution a peaceful resolution between the “Two Majesties” the Church and the State (Krauze 445). He single handedly imposed what was called “social education” which would focus on a Marxist-socialist education while at the same time would prohibit any anti-Church sentiments or comments in the schools.

In addition, as the famous liberal historian Daniel Cosio Villegas observed in 1936-37, when Cárdenas opened Mexico’s doors to numerous exiles from the Spanish Civil War, there was great “intellectual gain offered to Mexico by Franco’s decimation and uprooting of Spain’s minds and sensibilities (Krauze 476)”. The Casa de España, for example, one of the many institutions created by Spanish exiles would become the famous Colegio de México, one of the most reputed schools of higher education in Mexico today (Krauze 476).

Consequently, the intellectual environment in the country was influenced by communist ideas, with influential figures such as painters Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco playing pivotal roles in the political and cultural arenas of the country. This ideological trend continued during Rosario

---

⁹ Translated by Maureen Ahern, A RosarioCastellanos Reader. 233-235.

¹⁰ Ejido: Campo común de todos los vecinos de un pueblo donde se reúne al ganado y se establecen las eras. Common, public land.
Castellanos' teenage years in Mexico City. During these early years after the ending of the Mexican Revolution, the ruling elite's vision of nationhood was one that would shape the Mexican identity for most of the 20th Century.

After three hundred years of colonization, and more than one hundred of ideological struggle between the liberal and conservative heritages (Krauze 444), Mexico was believed to be ready for "modernization". This came in the shape of president Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-1952). It is probably not a coincidence that two major events happened during this period: first, the official renaming of the PNR or National Revolutionary Party as the PRI or Institutional Revolutionary Party. By doing so, the ruling elite had finally institutionalized the Mexican Revolution. Second, probably one of the most important testimonies in the written history of Mexico appeared in the shape of Octavio Paz's El laberinto de la soledad, where the preoccupation with modern Mexican identity was finally addressed.

In Castellanos' life, a preoccupation with identity was also emerging, not about who the Mexican was, but mostly about who the Mexican woman wanted to be. This general search for identity, as well as Alemán's vision of modernity, turned the president's attention towards the university. Enrique Krauze states that "If Cárdenas had become the owner of the myth of the Revolution, Alemán made the myth of the University his own (586)". During Alemán's presidency, UNAM would become the official institution of political recruitment for the political elites. However, most university graduates were not intellectuals, as Krauze explains:

All the university men were Mexicans, but only about 25,000 men and women (of 25 million Mexicans) formed the body of the university
graduates during the era of Alemán. Almost all the intellectuals held university degrees, but no more than a few dozen university men were intellectuals. The doctors, engineers, and especially the lawyers in the government were all university graduates, but they were not intellectuals. They were part of the social “estate” of “university men”, a group destined to gain growing access to power until they became the dominant force in Mexican public life. “Intellectuals” in Mexico were and are men of letters with a public reputation, who express their opinions in print on issues of general interest. (587)

Part of Alemán’s political machine was government-dependant journalism in the form of semiofficial papers such as Excélsior, El Universal and Noticias (579). Most journalists and some intellectuals became government employees (589); with the exception of the political magazines ¡Siempre! and Política, there was no true source of independent reports on political events or politicians (577). Castellanos, in fact, for most of her adult life, was part of both the Mexican ruling and intellectual elites. In 1953 for example, she received a grant from the Centro de Escritores Mexicanos to write about the contribution of women in Mexican culture. In 1954-55 with a grant from the Rockefeller Fund she was able to write Bahíin Canán which was published in 1957 (Seale 22). Also, she spent two years in Chiapas, 1956-57 directing the regional puppet theater, the Teatro Petul, for the Centro Coordinador Tzeltal-Tzotzil of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista in San Cristóbal de las Casas (Seale 23). During these years, when Castellanos’ search for identity led her back to Chiapas, literarily and artistically, her credibility as an objective
observer was questioned because of her personal involvement in the political machine as well as the fact that she was a *ladina* upper class woman.\(^\text{11}\)

However, while Castellanos worked within the political and social Mexican system she did not necessarily agree with their values; therefore, she used the system to influence the political culture of her day. While the vote had been granted to Mexican women in 1952 under the presidency of Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (Sefchovich 309), Castellanos still recognized the need for balancing the state of the two most marginalized groups of society, women and indigenous peoples. Still, by the time Adolfo López Mateos was president from 1958 to 1964, most Mexicans were well aware that what Cárdenas had achieved as peaceful resolutions were now hiding a very subtle form of repression, directed mostly by the then Minister of Interior Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, who would become the next president, and who many suggest was the real power behind a very ill president (Krauze 632). For Rosario Castellanos, as for many others, to be able to be part of the system while being able to express openly her political views was a challenge on its own. What better tool against repression than irony and self-deprecation—which Castellanos certainly mastered throughout her lifetime.

\(^\text{11}\) In the introduction of her book *Prospero’s Daughter: The Prose of Rosario Castellanos*, Joanna O’Connell connects Rosario Castellanos’ dilemma of race and class to Miranda, Prospero’s daughter from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. By making this analogy throughout her whole study of Castellanos, O’Connell asserts the predicament that Castellanos encountered as a writer and female thinker in a phallogocentric society.
For the rest of her life, Castellanos fought against a patriarchal system where women were seen mostly as either la Virgen de Guadalupe or la Malinche, saints or whores; where adultery by men was seen as a sign of manliness, but adultery by women was seen as a sign of deceit; where modern Mexico was far removed from agrarian Mexico; where the student movement (Krauze 694) had joined the rest of the world, while the feminist movement had not.

It seemed that Castellanos, like a handful of others like Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, Emilio Carballido, Rodolfo Usigli, Elena Poniatowska and Emilio Pacheco, was ahead of her time. By the time, in 1974, of her accidental death, she had covered more territory than any other Mexican feminist in her time and after. As Elena Poniatowska puts it:

Abrió grande la puerta de la literatura femenina y la inició. En cierta forma es gracias a ella que escribimos las que ahora pretendemos hacerlo. Antes que ella, nadie sino Sor Juana- fenómeno aparte que gira aislado y deslumbrante- se entregó realmente a su vocación. Ninguna vivió realmente para escribir. Rosario es finalmente eso, una creadora, una hacedora de libros.

She opened the door of feminine literature wide and she initiated it. To some extent it is thanks to her that we who try to write today, do so. Before her, nobody but Sor Juana-a side phenomenon that rotates isolated and bright-fully devoted herself to her vocation. None of them lived truly to write. Rosario is ultimately that, a creator, a book-maker. (Meditación 26)
Today, Rosario Castellanos is a well-known writer in Mexican and international academic circles, as shown by the recent monographs by María Luisa Gil Iriarte (*Debe haber otro modo de ser humano y libre: el discurso feminista en Rosario Castellanos*, 1997 and *Testamento de Hécuba: Mujeres e indígenas en la obra de Rosario Castellanos*, 1999), Joanna O’Connell (*Prospero’s Daughter: The Prose of Rosario Castellanos*, 1995), and Maureen Ahern (*A Rosario Castellanos Reader*, 1988 and *Homenaje a Rosario Castellanos*, 1980), to mention only a few.
Chapter II.

Rosario Castellanos’ Social Context and Feminist Trajectory.

Rosario Castellanos is considered one of the leading feminist thinkers of modern Mexico. Her work reflects a critical analysis of her own traditions. In her writing, she challenges the sacred institutions of Mexican society--Church, Government and Family--, while at the same time she is unable to deny that she was very much a product of them.

In *Cartas a Ricardo* (1996) for example, a compilation of letters she wrote to Ricardo Guerra from 1950 to 1952 and from 1966 to 1967, Rosario’s inner conflict is evident. On one hand she was aware of the feminist ideas of her time; yet, she was still conditioned to treat her lover as her superior. Castellanos asks Ricardo for constant approval, leaving clear testimony of the deeply-rooted cultural socialization of women as silent, passive, submissive partners to the men in their lives. In these letters one can see Castellanos fighting against the model while paradoxically epitomizing it herself. Her pain of being born and conditioned a woman appears often, most of all in the letters from 1966 to 1967, where a more mature Castellanos expresses a detached look at her personal relationships. Her tumultuous relationship with Ricardo did end in divorce; however, she was never really able to leave him emotionally (*Cartas* 23).

This ambivalence in Rosario’s life was present in her earlier works- most of all in *Sobre cultura femenina* (1950), Castellanos’ master’s thesis in philosophy. Extremely hard to find, most of what is known about it comes from articles and books written about Castellanos. Mary Seale Vásquez summarizes its importance in her article “Rosario Castellanos, image and idea”: 
Viewed by journalist Elena Poniatowska as the 'point of departure for the contemporary women's movement in Mexico,' the thesis was the first manifestation of the feminist posture which would become so important in Castellanos' poetry and essays. The thesis explored the reasons for the lack of female cultural participation finding that the terms in which such activity was carried out in a male dominated culture were alien to women, who sought permanence, not in works of art, but in motherhood. (21)

Most studies about Castellanos recognize the significance of such early appreciation of women's public and private standing in society. Joanna O'Connell is the first critic to dedicate a chapter to *Sobre cultura femenina*. To understand the evolution of Castellanos' feminist thought, it is important to note the isolation that she first encountered as a female intellectual. O'Connell explains critically the conflict and ambiguity found in *Sobre cultura femenina*. For O'Connell, Castellanos' thesis is an open attempt to reject the misogynist treatment of women by thinkers such as Schopenhauer, Weininger and Simmel (31). Yet, O'Connell disapproves of what she calls Castellanos' "own internalization of misogynist discourse" (29). O'Connell places Castellanos' intellectual conflict in what is known today as "Judith Fetterly's idea of 'immasculination'…whereby female readers are interpellated into a system of values that equates male experience with personhood" (29). Castellanos, adds O'Connell, "is deliberately adopting immasculination as a strategy of enunciation" (29). Still, O'Connell recognizes Castellanos, even in 1950, as a leading Mexican feminist thinker:

Written without the benefit of the decades of sustained feminist inquiry that have provided us with critical vocabulary and a wide audience for
such ideas, the essay raises many questions about women as cultural subjects that motivates [many] discussions. (26)

As a matter of fact, starting in the 1950’s, Castellanos challenged the literary status quo by writing exclusively about women. Her four essays published under the title Declaración de fe (1959) are an example of Castellanos’ new direction. In these essays she analyses Mexican women’s role in society based on a series of myths, beliefs and expectations which evolved throughout the four main periods in Mexican history. Today, much has been said about the three most significant cultural female figures in the Mexican psyche: La Malinche, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and La Virgen de Guadalupe. Castellanos, however, presents her audience with lesser known female figures such as the Popol Vuh’s Ixquic or “daughter-in-law” who establishes the ancient mistrust towards the outsider. Castellanos explains:

...es rechazada porque la descendencia sólo se reconocía por la línea materna y nadie podía incorporarse al clan si no era a través de la madre. A Ixquic no la admiten más que después de probar su habilidad (una habilidad casi milagrosa) para recolectar una gran cosecha. A pesar de todo es siempre considerada como una advenediza y sus hijos nacen, a escondidas de todos, en el monte. Pues en este periodo la maternidad era interpretada como el momento en que la persona de la mujer sufría la más grande humillación. Por lo mismo quién lo sufría debía ocultarlo como una vergüenza y como un estigma impuro.

...she is rejected because descent was only recognized through the maternal lineage and nobody could join the clan except through the
mother. Ixquic is only recognized after she proves her ability (almost miraculous) to harvest a great crop. In spite of all of this she is still considered a newcomer, and her children are born on a hill, hidden away from everyone. In that time period, maternity was considered the time in which the woman’s body suffered the greatest humiliation. Therefore, whoever suffered it, had to hide it as a shameful and impure stigma.

(Declaración 23)

Similar to what Julian Palley observes about Western Civilization in his introduction to Meditación en el umbral, there is a substantial historical move from pre-Hellenic and pre-Biblical female visible goddesses to the Judaic monolithic invisible God (61). By unveiling the pre-Columbian influence of figures such as Ixquic into the ethnic psyche, Castellanos explains how the feminine elements became uprooted by welcoming a patriarchal hegemony.

The power shift towards a patriarchal society, which values male offspring more, creates and exacerbates a deep mistrust between males and females. Such mistrust is derived from the idea that while males will carry the family name into future generations and are more “productive” than women, the offspring by daughters are more legitimate. The male-female family relationship ends up in deadlock since there is always doubt about the paternity of a son’s child while at the same time if the woman bears a son, that child becomes more cherished than a female offspring. For example, this set of distorted values is practiced even in today’s Mexico as Marta Torres explains about the special treatment of males over female offspring. Marta Torres explains that in a study done at the Hospital Civil of Guadalajara, Mexico, when a family encounters itself in a situation
of imminent starvation, boys are fed before girls, and when these children are taken to the hospital for nourishment, the boys recover sooner and faster than girls. Nurses feed boys first and larger amounts than they do girls.¹²

Ixquic is only one example of Castelanos search for answers to the cultural evolutionary path followed by Mexican women. In “La mujer en el mundo novohispano” Castellanos chooses Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*, and Juan Luis Vives’ *Instrucción de la mujer cristiana* as the point of departure for the Christian notion of woman:

La concepción cristiana del ser femenino no es antagónica de la concepción indígena, pero tampoco es idéntica. Representa un progreso, un matiz más favorable al conceder la igualdad última de las almas frente a su creador y al admitir que el sexo no es un obstáculo insalvable para las posibilidades de gracia divina y de salvación. Pero desde luego la semejanza *in extremis* no contradice la desproporción concreta y la inferioridad cotidiana de la mujer.

The Christian notion of being female is not antagonistic to the pre-Columbian notion, but is not identical. It represents a step, a more favorable shade of meaning by lending the ultimate sense of equality between the souls before their creator and by admitting that gender is not

¹² Notes from XII Curso Introductorio de Verano en Estudios de la Mujer. PIEM, Colegio de México, México, D.F. 25 de junio al 3 de agosto del 2001. Session with Dr. Marta Torres.
an insurmountable obstacle to obtaining divine grace and salvation. But unfortunately the similarity *in extremis* does not contradict the total inequality and the daily inferiority of women. (*Declaración* 46-7)

Castellanos recognizes that there was a zealous pre-Columbian dichotomy between male and female deities. She argues that Spanish Christian values contributed the notions of a world corrupted by a female-incarnated guilt (48), the threat of sexual impurity (48), and the risk of dishonorable behavior punished by death (52). The outcome is three hundred years of female shame. Still, Castellanos does not limit her thoughts merely to what she calls “mujeres comunes y corrientes” (common women). Castellanos questions Beauvoir’s observation that a series of special circumstances are required in order for a woman to conceive and to create a concrete project (*Declaración* 56). She illustrates her argument with the case of doña Oliva Sabuco de Nantes, who in 1587 published in Madrid *Nueva filosofía de la naturaleza del hombre, no conocida ni alcanzada por los filósofos antiguos, la cual mejora la vida y la salud humana.*

Castellanos points out that de Nantes was neither a “queen or regent” (56) nor a “mystic” (57).

“¿Eran la religión y el poder los dos únicos cauces por donde podía desembocar la actividad de una mujer superior? La historia nos dice que no” (Were Religion and Power the only two rivers that could lead to the superior activity of women? History says no) (57), explains Castellanos, “sin haber asistido a ninguna universidad ni cátedra pública, sólo con su estudio privado y llevada de su amor a las ciencias...anticipándose a su siglo, [Nantes]...presenta un nuevo sistema fisiológico...” (without attending neither a university nor a public school, only with her private study and carried by her love of
science... ahead of her century... she presents a new physiological system...)(58).

Nantes’ challenge to the male-dominated intellectual elites provides Castellanos with enough ammunition and inspiration to aspire to do the same, and to encourage other women “common or powerful” to follow the same path.

Similarly, for Castellanos, the fact that political wives doña Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez and Leona Vicario managed to be highly influential in their time, had more to do with the political and social unrest of the 18th Century than with the misogynist ideas of Voltaire (1694-1778) and Montesquieu (1689-1755).

Castellanos concludes in “La época independiente” that in fact it was not Voltaire’s notion of woman as less strong, less tall, less resistant than men, nor Montesquieu’s geographical division between the cold North and the warm South that actually influenced Mexican women’s socialization. She specifies:

En un país donde el clima cálido es predominante; donde las costumbres, arrancando desde la tradición indígena y pasando por ese matiz árabe del que se tiñe la concepción del mundo española, permiten, no de derecho pero sí de hecho, una poligamia vergonzante, peor por la falta de ley que rija este tipo de relaciones.

En ciudades de “calles sin mujeres”, porque se les enclaustraba en conventos y casas. En una nación que se encontraba retratada en las que describe Montesquieu como orientales o asiáticas pero que aspiraba fervientemente a europeizarse, sobrepasando su destino geográfico, ¿cómo serían interpretadas estas teorías? Así como la distancia tan grande entre las ideas de igualdad y la realidad concreta de castas en las que estaba
dividido el México de entonces ha hecho que algunos de los historiadores al interpretar los hechos duden de la influencia de las doctrinas sobre los actos que modificaron esa realidad y encuentren otros motivos más próximos, menos remotos, así no parece creíble que sobre la mujer mexicana tan femenina, tan recatada, tan tímida, tan hecha para no hacer nada, la fuerza de unas palabras, de unos pensamientos la inflamaran hasta el punto de convertirla en una heroína, en una mártir.

In a country where a warm climate predominates; where customs starting with the pre-Columbian tradition and passing through the Arabic influence that colors Spanish culture, an embarrassing polygamy is allowed and made worse for the lack of laws to control those types of relations.

In cities with “streets without women” because they were imprisoned in convents and residences. In a nation that found itself placed among those described by Montesquieu as Oriental and Asian but that aspired fervently to be European in spite of its geographical destiny, how would these theories be interpreted? Just as the wide distance between equality and reality confirmed by the castes in which Mexico was divided has caused some historians to question whether these doctrines had any bearing on Mexico’s reality. Therefore, they found other motives, less remote, so that it would be not credible that the Mexican woman so feminine, so demure, so shy, so made to do nothing, the strength of some
words, of some ideas would transform her to the extent of turning her into a heroine, and a martyr. (Declaración 79)

In “La mujer en la época actual”, Castellanos considers the utopian ideas of Claude de Saint-Simon (1760-1825), Charles Fourier (1772-1837) and Etienne Cabet (1788-1856) in their The New Woman as of great influence on Beauvoir. Equally, Castellanos links the political aspirations of Jeanne Diconn in 1848 with women’s aspirations for political equality in late 1950’s Mexico. By finding the sources that lead to innovative concepts, Castellanos manages, in her essays, to educate the reader (even today) while at the same time challenging the political, social and intellectual establishment of her time. She achieves this through what she knows best: writing. It is because of her political and social standing that many of her writings were published, creating a forum for female discussion and self-awareness.

Julian Palley and Elena Poniatowska, in their introduction to Meditación en el umbral (1985), agree that Castellanos’ struggle in favour of creating women’s self-awareness about the role they forced them to play in contemporary Mexican society is clearer than ever. What is specifically important about this collection, according to Palley, is Castellanos’ honesty about such private preoccupations as sexuality and unrequited love, as well as the public challenges of women’s subordination at all levels of Mexican society (Meditación 33). It is no coincidence that in this collection the famous feminist poems “La lamentación de Dido” (1953-1955) and “El testamento de Hécuba” (1969) are found.
Castellanos’ feminist writings were not the only testimony she left in her pledge for equality. She had already written in 1957 what is probably her most famous novel *Balún Canán*. This novel is considered one of the most in-depth and unbiased analyses of social and gender relations in the Mexican South. It also moved away from the paternalistic view of the natives as well as the Western portrayal of non-white peoples as “the noble savage.” It reveals a vast knowledge of indigenous Mayan beliefs, idiosyncrasies and attitudes. Castellanos, by not differentiating between the two races, the *mestizo* and the indigenous, goes beyond the parameters of race and culture. She gives, instead, an innovative critique of gender relations among and between *mestizo* and indigenous peoples.

*Balún Canán* is also very important in Castellanos’ exploration of the self. Joanna O’Connell and Maria Luisa Gil Iríarte\(^{13}\) agree that Castellanos’ use of many stories within a story to create a palimpsest provides the reader with the many faces of a people. Castellanos ultimately acknowledges the importance of both oral and written discourse through the insertion of many narrators and many voices. Castellanos re-creates the collective memory of Comitán the same way that Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* re-creates the collective memory of the people of Comala in 1953.

Later, in *Ciudad Real* (1960), Castellanos uses a series of stories as a device to create a testimonial of many voices, unlike the collective memory in Rulfo’s *Pedro*

---

\(^{13}\) See chapters on *Balún Canán* in both Joanna O’Connell’s *Prospero’s Daughter: The Prose of Rosario Castellanos* and Maria Luisa Gil Iríarte’s *El testamento de Hécuba: Mujeres e indígenas en la obra de Rosario Castellanos.*
Páramo, where there is but one story told from many points of view. In “La muerte del tigre” Castellanos asserts that what she is about to tell is a testimony of a defeated people, a testimony of a centuries-old struggle that had become the origin of a culture: “En este papel que habla se consigna la verdad” (In this paper that speaks the truth is told) (Ciudad 16)

Although the indigenous situation in Mexico remains a social and political issue, Joanna O’Connell affirms that Castellanos’ stories in Ciudad Real are centered on a racially-constructed notion of Mexico as a nation. O’Connell reaches this conclusion after basing her own study of Castellanos on the anthropological analysis of 1950’s Mexico (108-9). Ciudad Real seems to be Castellanos’ foreground for her novel Oficio de Tinieblas (1962) where she actually expands some of the characters and stories of the former. In Oficio, while portraying a social and political system with its myths, beliefs, attitudes and unspoken rules, Castellanos more than ever expresses strong views about the disadvantages of being female in societies that have been regarded as male-centered for centuries.

It is through the female characters’ silence that Castellanos conveys her strongest messages. Some of the most important characters, all women, express themselves through silent monologues. They “think” many of the dialogues, yet they do not make themselves heard. In that case, Castellanos questions women’s perceived submissiveness by declaring them thinking beings, observers fully aware of their destinies and of the injustices imposed on them. Castellanos also touches on many topics that have been important for Mexico as a nation. Oficio de Tinieblas teaches the reader about the
realities of land-ownership, racism, Mexican religious synchronism, racial, social and gender hierarchies, but most of all about indigenismo, as O'Connell explains:

Another part of her intellectual task is her engagement with the dilemmas of Mexican nationalism. Through her participation in Mexican indigenismo (indigenism), a political and intellectual movement concerned with the integration of indigenous people into national life, she tried to delineate the mechanisms of racism and structural inequality that have prolonged oppression of indigenous people despite the promises of the Mexican revolution (1910-1924). Three of Castellanos’ five volumes of fiction can be called indigenista (indigenist) writing; that is, they are part of a major current of Latin American literature concerned with the denunciation of oppression and exploitation suffered by people known as Indians. Indigenismo poses national questions by linking the colonial past and the enterprise of conquest with present conditions and the need for a program of change. [...] Unlike many other indigenista writers, however, in Mexico and elsewhere, Castellanos tried in her writing to understand and represent how gender is at work in the deployment of difference and in the struggle between competing visions of national identity. (2-3)

Furthermore, Castellanos’ concerns with the indigenista cause were not limited to her novels. In 1959 in her collection of poems Poesía no eres tú, she included the two dramatic poems “Judith” and “Salomé”. In the case of “Judith”, Castellanos depicts a ladino woman who in her wedding night tries to kill her lover Juan after he tries to stop her from leaving him. Castellanos underlines Judith’s transgression by portraying her as
an individual with ideals, ideals that belong to the male public sphere and not the
traditional female private sphere. Just as the Old Testament's Judith, Castellanos' Judith
wants to help her people, in this case the people of Chiapas; however, in the poem Judith
does not start as a widow. Judith causes Juan's death after she challenges him to let her
go to the place where an indigenous revolt is taking place. At the end, after Juan's death,
Judith chooses to spend her life in oblivion rather than being submitting to the traditional
role of wife.

This self-liberation is seen also in "Salome". Taking one of the most despised
women in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Castellanos transforms the New Testament's
Salome into a new model of liberation. Salome's sexual objectification, which in the
ancient story transforms Herodias' daughter into a manipulative concubine, totally
disappears in Castellanos' poem. Instead, in the poem, the political leader that enters
Salome's bedroom during his escape from her own father, the town's cacique, is an
Indian. Both John the Baptist and el hombre, as Castellanos generically calls him,
represent "the other". However, in the ancient story, Salome fears John for he has judged
her mother and her step-father Herod. In Castellanos' story, to the contrary, Salome does
not feel foreign to this man. She identifies completely with him because he is from the
same race as the nana that nursed her.

As she does in Balún Canán and Oficio de Tinieblas, Castellanos presents in these
two long poems a clear model of discrimination engrained in Mexican society. Ladino
men discriminate against the women around them (wives, daughters, sisters), ladino men
and women discriminate against indigenous men and women, indigenous men
discriminate against the indigenous women around them (fertile and barren), and finally,
indigenous women discriminate against other indigenous women (daughters, barren women, terminally-ill, and dependants).

Castellanos will continue to condemn and testify to such rampant discrimination in her later literature. In the short stories Los convidados de agosto (1964), Castellanos writes one of her strongest commentaries on Mexican women’s lives. In stories like “Vals Capricho”, “Los convidados de agosto” and “El viudo Román,” Castellanos moves away completely from indigenous characters and condemns the social imprisonment of mestiza women in small rural towns. She questions what had been some of her major preoccupations throughout her feminist work. First of all, she challenges the idea of the barbarous or uneducated woman, Reinerie in “Vals Capricho”, who falls prey to civilization represented by her aunts and the rest of the town, but who at the end decides to go back to “la barbarie”14. Therefore, as her name implies, Reinerie at the end will reign in her own life.

14 La barbarie: a term related to Rómulo Gallegos’ Doña Bárbara, Venezuela (1941).

According to Sharon Magnarelli, “classified as a novela terrígena, Doña Bárbara has been studied by a multitude of critics and scholars, most of whom have tended to focus on the use of nature and the thematic opposition between barbarism and civilization.” (3) “Woman and Nature in Doña Bárbara by Rómulo Gallegos”. Revista de Estudios Hispánicos, St. Louis, MO, 19:2, May, 1985, 3-20.

José Castro-Urioste in “La imagen de nación en Doña Bárbara” states that “los textos que emplean esta dicotomía [barbarismo vs. civilización] proponen un determinado modelo de desarrollo para las sociedades latinoamericanas. Para escritores como
Second, Castellanos questions the misogynist notion of women as spinsters. For example, Emelina’s comparison to a howling dog in “Los convidados de agosto” represents vividly the desperation that women felt when they tried to break away from the constraints dictated by a value system based on marriage and motherhood. Similarly, Romelia’s virginity in “El viudo Román” represents possession, honour, pride, worth, and ultimately a commodity in a value system that established a double standard for men and women. Castellanos questions in fact, not only the social implications of such value system but its intellectual oppression as well.

Published in 1972, the collection of short stories *Album de familia* presents to the public a story that gives this collection its title. However, it is important to note that Castellanos wrote the short story “Album de familia” in 1964 as a chapter to her novel *Rito de iniciación*. As Eduardo Mejia explains in his “afterword” to *Rito de iniciación* Castellanos apparently wrote it in 1964, but after showing it to some of her friends, the novel was not favourably accepted, so she announced in 1969 that she would destroy it.

She took all the copies away from her friends. However, in 1995, when the publishing house Fondo de Cultura Económica regained interest in Castellanos' work, the original manuscript of *Rito de iniciación* was found in a warehouse that Castellanos had leased 25 years earlier. Yet, Castellanos published parts of "Album de familia" in some of her newspaper articles.\(^{15}\)

In "Album de familia", Castellanos integrates into her writing her personal experiences as a woman writer. Shaping the main character, Matilde, after her admired poet Gabriela Mistral (O’Quinn 101), Castellanos allows herself to expose some of the realities of her contemporary writers. By shifting the focus of her short stories to the public sphere, Castellanos transfers women’s lives into a more open debate on what their role should and could be in society.

Also, Castellanos, portraying herself as Cecilia, the young aspiring writer in the story, who along with her best friend Susana witnesses a round table of aging women poets, ends the story with these two young women questioning the importance of becoming a writer. Castellanos seems to leave an open ending to the story and also to the identity of this young woman, Cecilia. *Rito de iniciación*, however, closes the circle. As some critics have recognized about *Rito de iniciación*, this novel comes to close what is known as Castellanos’ *Ciclo de Chiapas* that starts with *Balún Canán*.\(^{16}\) Scholars have recognized that *Balún Canán*, with a seven-year-old girl as its protagonist-narrator, is a

---


\(^{16}\) *Ciudad Real* and *Oficio de Tinieblas* are the other two books considered as part of this cycle.
semibiographical account of Castellanos’ childhood in Comitán. Throughout *Bahín Canán* this young girl does not have a name. The novel finishes with the young girl refusing to speak but repeatedly writing her dead brother’s name on a wall, poignantly underlining the fact that the male offspring has a name while the female does not. Therefore, in *Rito de iniciación*, Castellanos is willing not only to give the young girl a name, Cecilia, but also a voice, a very strong, opinionated voice and a sense of destiny. Castellanos, unquestionably, defines herself in Cecilia, as a young university student in Mexico City during the late 1940’s and early 1950’s. Castellanos expresses openly many of her most personal preoccupations such as the marks left by memory (50, 61), questions she wished she had asked her own father (62, 63), about the role played by the mother in the Mexican psyche (85, 86), on what is like to want to be a writer and feel ashamed of it (82, 83), and the loss of her virginity out of conviction and not out of carnal desire (336, 337). Still, Castellanos’ most brutal confession is the realization that to become the writer that she wants to be, she needs to do it completely alone. Cecilia must walk the path of literary loneliness on her own terms. Indeed, a woman writer can only achieve the enormity of her desires by giving up her dependence on others, and finally embracing her own self. For Castellanos it seemed that the lack of feminist thought within Mexican intellectual circles was a determining factor for her decision to withdraw this early attempt to establish a feminist forum.

Therefore, *Album de familia* became her introductory urban feminist arena by pulling away from her *indigenista* writing and moving towards a less rural setting. In the first three short stories, “Lección de cocina”, “Domingo” y “Cabecita blanca”, Castellanos describes three stages in the domestic lives of women. The first one is the
newly-wed who is just learning to cook a steak. This steak becomes the metaphor for this woman’s life from a raw piece of meat to a burnt piece of hard unrecognizable flesh.

“Domingo” is one of the few instances where Castellanos will openly discuss issues such as homosexuality, *malinchismo*\(^\text{17}\), deception, infidelity and abortion. “Cabecita blanca” is the story of a grandmother who remembers her life stage by stage. Castellanos dissects the social realities of the Mexican family which are usually covered up by the matriarch in the family. In fact, women’s domestic lives were a major concern in many of Castellanos’ works. By problematizing the domestic experiences of women, Castellanos set herself to question the private world in which she felt women had been imprisoned for centuries.

Castellanos dares to introduce her thoughts into mainstream Mexico with numerous articles published in the newspaper *Excélsior* from 1963 to 1974. *El uso de la palabra* (1974) provides today’s readers with an anthology of such articles. They touch upon a wide range of subjects such as history, political and cultural criticism, and, most of all, the introduction of literary and philosophical female figures of the day. It is important to note Castellanos’ ability to disseminate knowledge. A few of the articles for *Excélsior* deal with topics that she had already addressed or that she would later introduce in some of her books. For example, in “Historia de una mujer rebelde” Castellanos talks about some contemporary female writers such as the Venezuelan Teresa de la Parra, the

\(^{17}\) *Malinchismo* from Malinche is a term used in Mexico to describe hate or strong dislike for anything Mexican, or to describe a preference for anything foreign, most of all of Spanish origin.
Chilean Mercedes Valdivierio, and the Mexican María Luisa Ocampo. María Luisa Ocampo’s *La Virgen Fuerte* (*El uso 39*) appears later on in *Declaración de fe* (108) in 1959 and subsequently in *Rito de iniciación* (288) in 1964. Also in “Historia mexicana” (1966), she introduces to her readers the main character from *Rito de iniciación*, Cecilia. Considering that most Mexicans did not read books in 1966, Castellanos’ articles in *Excélsior* provided her with a wider audience and consequently a better opportunity to influence women whose only source of information was the newspaper that their husbands brought home or that they bought themselves at the market.

A more subtle strategy to introduce feminist ideas into mainstream Mexico appears in *Mujer que sabe latín*... (1973), a book of essays about women writers who write about women. These essays are a broad and general overview of foreign and Mexican writers such as Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Simone Weil, Doris Lessing, Natalia Ginzburg, Karen Blixen, Elsa Triolet, Violette Leduc, Betty Friedan, Mercedes Rodoreda, María Luisa Bombal, Silvina Ocampo, and María Luisa Mendoza among others. This work is significant because it shows that by now Castellanos had learned enough about other women feminists that she could actually share such knowledge with Mexican readers. She enters territory never explored before by a female Mexican journalist by presenting their lives and ideas in newspaper articles. By acknowledging them as part of her own intellectual background, Castellanos sets new guidelines for feminist thought and learning in Mexican intellectual circles.

Finally in 1975, after Castellanos’ untimely death, her last piece of work was published, the play *El eterno femenino*. Castellanos called it a farce because she mocks, as she did in many of her poems and essays, the conventional models of female behavior.
In the first act, the protagonist Lupita, who is about to get married and is in a beauty salon, sees passing in front of her as in a movie all the stages that she will encounter in her future. From her honeymoon, to motherhood, to the bitterness of a stale marriage, to her elder years, Lupita realizes, as she is getting ready for her wedding, the disenchchantment in a woman’s life.

In the second act of *El eterno femenino*, Castellanos rewrites Mexican history by allowing the best-known female historical figures to tell their stories. Castellanos turns the biblical Eve, La Malinche, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Doña Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez, Empress of Mexico Carlota, and the Mexican Revolution’s fighter Adelita into the main players of some of the most crucial moments of Mexican history.

Furthermore, by naming the protagonist in *El eterno femenino* “Lupita,” Castellanos is adding to this list of historical figures a major icon of Mexican culture: the Virgen of Guadalupe. In the third act, Lupita is back in the beauty salon, where the stylist offers her a number of wigs to try on after Lupita has rejected all the options that appeared in front of her in Act One. In this last act, every wig represents a choice for her future, she could be a spinster, a prostitute, a mistress, a government censured journalist, an official party representative, a grandmother or a feminist. Surprisingly, at the end of the play, after going through each one of the wigs, Lupita decides to get married rather than ending up alone as a “nobody” (if she were to choose to become a feminist, or a working woman). The ideas presented in *El eterno femenino* and many of her works during those last years of her life were highly innovative for a very traditional audience. At that point in time, very few people had dared challenge one of the most sacred institutions in Mexico, the family. Castellanos was not against Mexico or Mexicans (men
and women); however, she wanted to rearrange the foundations of her world so that all voices could be heard. In her writings against what she saw as women's conformity and complacency, Castellanos manages to trigger thought, discussion, and the reshaping of basic cultural values.
Chapter III.


“Lamentación de Dido” is today one of Rosario Castellanos’ most famous poems. An analysis of her poem must take into account three questions: first, how, by taking the radical views of three European thinkers—Beauvoir, Woolf and Weil—, Castellanos creates her own feminist discourse; second, why she chooses the Aeneid’s Dido over other ancient models of femininity; and, third, how, by retelling the ancient story of queen Dido—a woman warrior, a generous hostess, an unrequited lover, and a desperate martyr who commits suicide—, Castellanos conveys her own lament about the status of Mexican women.

Castellanos offers in “Lamentación de Dido” her own views on womanhood. She also explores how our literary ancestors have influenced the stories and lives of women throughout history. By integrating the female perspective in her work, she differentiates herself from writers such as Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, and Julio Cortázar who had explored Hispanic American identities. These male writers incorporated “woman” in their philosophies more as a counterpart to man than as a representative of her own desires and preoccupations. Castellanos sets out to go beyond the limitations established by her male peers by giving a voice to Dido, a well-appreciated female character of antiquity.

First, by taking Virginia Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own as a model for revisionist writing, Castellanos follows Woolf’s initiative to appreciate and bring back into the limelight her literary predecessors. Castellanos summarizes the basis of her feminist work in her essay “Virginia Woolf y el vicio impune”: 
Si Virginia Woolf las evoca [refiriéndose a Laetitia Pilkington, Miss Ormerod, Margaret Cavendish, Jane Austen y Emily Bronté] no es por mera simpatía, no es para comparar soledades, rechazos, burlas, escándalos; es, fundamentalmente, por sentido de la tradición y porque si le es preciso conocerse y situarse en tanto que escritora, tiene que medir a quienes le antecedieron.

If Virginia Woolf evokes them [Leatitia Pilkington, Miss Ormerod, Margaret Cavendish, Jane Austen and Emily Bronté], it is not solely out of sympathy, it is not to compare loneliness, rejections, mockeries, scandals; it is fundamentally out of a sense of tradition and because since she finds it necessary to define her own place as a writer, she has to measure those who preceded her. (Mujer 79)

Second, she was also influenced, while studying in Spain under Dámaso Alonso in 1950 and 1951, by Simone de Beauvoir’s challenges to the Western conceptualization of woman. Castellanos presented such ideas as new radical challenges to the conformity embedded in the old Western culture that was part of the Mexican identity. She renders Beauvoir’s magnificent words on the creation of gender “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir 267), in her own words, years later, in Mujer que sabe latin:

A lo largo de la historia (la historia es el archivo de los hechos cumplidos por el hombre, y todo lo que queda fuera de él pertenece al reino de la conjetura, de la fábula, de la leyenda, de la mentira) la mujer ha
sido, más que un fenómeno de la naturaleza, más que un componente de la sociedad, más que una criatura humana, un mito.

Simone de Beauvoir afirma que el mito implica siempre un sujeto que proyecta sus esperanzas y sus temores hacia el cielo de lo trascendente. En el caso que nos ocupa, el hombre convierte a lo femenino en un receptáculo de estados de ánimo contradictorios y lo coloca en un más allá en el que se nos muestra una figura, si bien variable en sus formas, monótona en su significado.

Throughout history (history being the archive of man’s accomplishments, and everything that is outside of it belongs to the terrain of conjecture, fable, legend or fiction), Woman has been rather than a natural phenomenon, rather than a component of society, rather than a human creature, a myth.

Simone de Beauvoir affirms that myth always implies a subject that projects its hopes and fears towards the heights of the transcendental. In the case at hand, man transforms what is feminine into a receptacle of contradictory states of mind and placing it in a space beyond, where it appears to us as a being of variable forms, but ultimately monotonous.

(Mujer 9)

Finally, Castellanos is also inspired by Simone Weil’s desire for a higher level of understanding human suffering. In her essay “Simone Weil: la que pertenece en los umbrales” Castellanos offers Weil’s idea that the soul must empty itself from all thoughts
and feelings in order to truly arrive to that higher sphere of giving oneself to the sufferer. Castellanos summarizes Weil’s idea in the following words:

…cualquier persona, aun cuando sus disposiciones propias sean casi nulas, es capaz de experimentar la vivencia de los mismos valores que intuye el talento más privilegiado, a condición de hacer ‘perpetuamente un esfuerzo de atención para alcanzarlos’. […] La atención consiste en suspender el pensamiento, dejarlo en disponibilidad, vacío y penetrable. (Mujer 57)

These words come from Weil’s essay “Reflections on the right use of school studies”:

The capacity to give one’s attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it is a miracle. […] This way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth.

(Weil 51)

The evolution of Castellanos’ feminist thought came from her search for a discourse that could both question and explain the disadvantages of all those whom Castellanos saw as the unfortunate. By choosing queen Dido of Carthage for her “Lamentación de Dido”, written between 1953 and 1955, Castellanos honours womanhood in all its facets, modern and ancient. Castellanos represents the diversity of her own culture by integrating elements of both European and Mexican Indigenous cultures into one poem.

The choice of Dido to represent women might seem puzzling to some since, according to critics, Virgil’s Aeneid has served through the centuries as a justification for
empire building. As Marilynn Desmond suggests in *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval Aeneid*:

As a school text, the *Aeneid* has generally been read by one segment of the population—the male elite, destined by education and/or birth to occupy powerful positions in a hierarchically arranged social structure, a structure in which Latin literacy played a significant role in the formation of a “persecuting society.” (3)

Desmond contends, as other literary critics have asserted in recent past, that the European feminist thinkers in the first half of the 20th century were set against a social model based on a male-centered imperialistic hegemony. To prove her point, Desmond cites T.S. Elliot’s presidential address to the Virgil Society in 1944:

[Aeneas is] the symbol of Rome; and as Aeneas is to Rome, so is ancient Rome to Europe. Thus Virgil acquires the centrality of the unique classic; he is the centre of European civilization, in a position which no other poet can share or usurp. The Roman Empire and the Latin language were not any empire and any language, but an empire and a language with a unique destiny in relation to ourselves; and the poet in whom that Empire and that language came to consciousness and expression is a poet of unique destiny. (6)

Desmond’s analysis of Virgil’s *Aeneid* provides feminists with a painful view of some of the ancient patriarchal values embedded in Greco-Roman culture, though not without its merits. However, in order to appreciate Rosario Castellanos’ version of Dido’s story, it is necessary to appreciate the cultural richness of Virgil’s recount of Dido’s
legend. No other author before or after enhanced more the image of queen Dido than Virgil himself.

Although there is an early version of Dido’s story in which she is portrayed as a Phoenician queen who commits suicide rather than marry against her will (Bulfinch 262, and Senior 60), in Virgil’s version Dido is a multilayered portrait of woman. Dido symbolizes many women, the women of pre-Christian Rome. By granting her almost center stage in the Aeneid’s Books I and IV, Virgil bestows upon Dido as much importance as he does upon Aeneas.

Virgil lays out all the queen’s qualities. Dido is a queen with the poise of a goddess:

While Trojan Aeneas stood gazing, rooted to the spot and lost in amazement at what he saw, queen Dido in all her beauty arrived at the temple with a great crowd of warriors around her. She was like Diana leading the dance on the banks of the Eurotas […] She carries her quiver on her shoulder, and as she walks, she is the tallest of all the goddesses […] Dido was like Diana and like Diana she bore herself joyfully among her people, urging on their work for the kingdom that was to be. (Virgil 19)

Dido is a hostess with the desires of a seductress:

‘Have no fear, men of Troy.’ [Says Dido]… ‘Whether you choose to go to great Hesperia and the fields of Saturn, or to the land of Eryx and king Acestes, you will leave here safe under my protection, and I shall give you supplies to help you on your way. Or do you wish to settle here with me
on an equal footing, even here in this kingdom of Carthage? The city of
which I am founding is yours’. (Virgil 21-22)

Finally, Dido is a victim with the heart of a warrior:

‘I have founded a glorious city and lived to see the building of my own
walls. I have avenged my husband and punished his enemy who was my
brother. I would have been happy, more than happy, if only Trojan keels
had never grounded on our shores.’ She then buried her face for a moment
in the bed and cried: ‘We shall die unavenged. But let us die.’ [...] So she
spoke and while speaking fell upon the sword. (Virgil 102)

Although Virgil’s portrayal of Dido gives the impression of being an imperialist-
misogynist characterization of women as Desmond suggests, an alternate reading of it is
possible. As suggested by Arthur Stanley Pease in his annotated edition of the Aeneid’s
Book IV, it is “[t]he poet’s own interest in his heroine [that leads] some critics to
maintain not only that his real sympathies were with Dido, but that her cause so gained
with him the upper hand as to endanger the purpose and unity of the whole poem”
(Stanley 7-8).

In “Lamentación de Dido” Rosario Castellanos develops Dido’s betrayal,
alienation and otherness, and creates a parallelism between the ancient Phoenician queen
and the lives of modern Mexican women. The poem starts with a powerful statement:

Guardiana de las tumbas; botín para mi hermano,
el de la corva garra de gavilán;

Guardian of tombs; my brother’s loot,
he of the sparrowhawk's curved claw;\textsuperscript{18}

With this line Castellanos links the story of Dido queen of Carthage with her own personal experience as well as with the lives of many Mexican peasant women. In the \textit{Aeneid}, the section where Pygmalion, ruler of Tyre, assassinates his sister Dido's husband, Sychaeus, is introduced only as a reference for the future development of Dido's story (Virgil 14). In "Lamentación," however, these first lines become one of the strongest points of departure in the poem by testifying to the fact that the status of Mexican women has been secondary to the status of their fathers and brothers since pre-Columbian times. Such cultural reality Castellanos knew only too well to mark her throughout her entire life.

Both María Luisa Gil Iriarte in \textit{Testamento de Hécuba}, ["Porque Rosario...es Dido amasando con sus manos mil y un destino y sospeché que debía de haber 'otro modo de ser humano y libre'" (149)]\textsuperscript{19}, and Perla Shwartz in \textit{Mujer que supo latín}, ["Se presenta como alegoría de la desventura. Es su propia vida transfigurada en la metáfora. Es Dido-Rosario, dualidad confrontada con la existencia masculina: 'Nave de ariosas

---

\textsuperscript{18} All references to this poem are from Castellanos, Rosario, "Lamentación de Dido", \textit{Meditación en el umbral}, México: Fondo de cultura económica, 1993, 120-125. This line is in page 120. The translation of the poem is mine.

\textsuperscript{19} "Because Rosario...is Dido kneading with her hands a thousand and one destinies and she suspected that there had to be ‘another way to be human and free’". 
velas, nave graciosa, sacrificada al rayo de las tempestades’”(74)]20 have identified Castellanos herself with Dido. Unfortunately when both critics see Rosario as Dido, they are actually limiting the scope of the poem. While it is a well-documented fact that Castellanos was greatly affected by her younger brother’s death when they were both very young, Castellanos’ social consciousness goes beyond her personal suffering. Indeed, Castellanos’ inspiration for her writing comes mostly from the suffering of others, not just her own, although, her sense of loneliness and alienation does play a role in her writing (Meditación 18). Therefore, Castellanos’ statement that a woman, a Mexican woman, is her brother’s booty can be read as an attack on the gender hierarchies embedded in rural Mexico. During the period that Castellanos wrote “Lamentación” there was a strong social awareness in favour of the peasant cause which was not only divided by class and race but most of all by gender.

The unjust socio-economic realities that had all along affected Mexican rural women became apparent with president Cárdenas’ socialist Agrarian Reforms of 1934. Rosario Castellanos, in her early phase as a writer, believed firmly in those reforms (as she attests in her essay “A man of destiny,” 1970). The idea was that by taking away landownership from a ladino minority and redistributing it as small farming plots into the campesinos’ (peasant farmers) hands, social justice would be introduced in a social system eroded by centuries of strong hierarchical attitudes and beliefs. In theory, as

20 “She presents herself as an allegory of misfortune. It is her own life transfigured in a metaphor. It is Dido-Rosario, a duality confronted with the masculine existence: ‘gracious ship, sacrificed to the tempest’s thunder’."

officially stipulated in the Mexican Constitution of 1917, and the Agrarian Reform Acts of 1934, 1942, and subsequently, of 1971, every Mexican peasant, man or woman, was eligible to an equal portion of farming land. However, in practice, that was not the case.

As Rocío Esparza Salinas points out in her study *Las mujeres campesinas ante las reformas del artículo 27 de la Constitución*, under the Agrarian Reforms, farming property is allocated only to males. For women to benefit in such a system, they must be widows with dependant children. Even in this case, the mostly elderly widows who are physically unable to work the land must rely on young males, like their sons or grandsons, in order to garner financial benefits from the plots. Also, most peasant women (married or common-law women, women alone because their husbands are temporarily absent as seasonal workers, single mothers and single women) do not have access to land-ownership (32).

While embedding in her poetry her social preoccupations of racial and gender inequality, Castellanos does not move far from the ancient story of Dido. As the poem develops, Castellanos identifies every line with the *Aeneid*’s Dido. Yet, Castellanos also creates her own story of Dido as she moves along in the poem. She achieves this by giving Dido her own sense of identity. For example, instead of alluding to Aeneas’ shipwreck, she transforms Dido metaphorically into the ship:

\[
\text{nave de airosas velas, nave graciosa, sacrificada al rayo de las tempestades;}
\]

ship of elegant sails, graceful ship, sacrificed to the storm’s lightning; ("Lamentación", 120)
Dido, with the majestic poise of a queen, begins as a subject herself; she is not only subjected to her brother’s memory, but also to the storm of exile. Castellanos acknowledges the heritage of Mexican women: on one hand, the españolas who came with the colonizadores after the conquest of Mexico, and also the Native women who were part of the booty of the conquistadores. Consequently, these women--Spanish, Native and mestizas-- became the nodrizas of modern Mexico.

Castellanos recognizes that after three hundred years of Iberian influence modern Mexico was the result of both pre-Columbian cultures and the cultural influences brought by the Spanish. Although most of the original newcomers were male adventurers (MacLachlan 210), European women were an important component of New Spain’s new society (MacLachlan 230). As Castellanos shows in Declaración de fe (1959), for centuries, Mexican women had been the result of an evolutionary process based on local native myths and foreign shaping forces. Many of these foreign influences were immigrant women as Colin MacLachlan and Jaime E. Rodriguez point out: “the few European women who arrived in 1521 served only to reinforce the beginnings of settled Mexican society. They taught the new society the preferred behavior and the social forms of Spain” (MacLachlan 230).

For Castellanos, it was important to give voice to these women who were part of the social and political context of New Spain:

mujer que asiste por primera vez la planta del pie
en tierras desoladas
y es más tarde nodriza de naciones, nodriza que
amamanta con leche de sabiduría y de consejo;
woman who sets foot for the first time
on desolated soil
and later is the nurturer of nations, nurturer that
nurses with the milk of wisdom and advice; ("Lamentación", 120)

Therefore, by rewriting the story of an ancient figure such as Dido, Castellanos grants a voice to her own ancestors, in this way bringing them out of historical obscurity. For this reason she declares in "Lamentación":

mujer siempre, y hasta el fin, que con el mismo pie
de la sagrada peregrinación
sube-arrastrando la oscura cauda de su memoria-

woman always, and until the end, who with the same step
of sacred peregrination
climbs-dragging the dark wealth of her memory- ("Lamentación", 120)

Castellanos is condemning the reality of women’s lives in New Spain- European, native or mestizas, who, due to misogynist prejudices, were treated as subordinates regardless of their economic, social or racial status. Castellanos’ Mexican Dido, who is aware of the remote memories of male domination, knows that she is set to be the subordinate female figure for eternity. However, for the poet, these lines are the transition towards a poem of defiance. Castellanos, without diminishing Dido’s archetypical significance, tells her story entirely from the female point of view, Dido’s and Rosario’s.

Hence, Castellanos returns momentarily to the ancient tale with one line:
hasta la pira alzada del suicidio.

towards the high pyre of suicide. ("Lamentación", 120)

This line reminds her readers that this ancient heroine has defied her female destiny by
daring to choose death over failure, failure in love and failure in founding Carthage. From
here on, Castellanos, with her erudite language asserts ancient Dido’s legacy to the
Western psyche, and consequently to independent Mexico. Castellanos declares in
"Lamentación":

Tal es el relato de mis hechos. Dido es mi nombre. Destinos
como el mío se han pronunciado desde la antigüedad
con palabras hermosas y nobilísimas.

This is the tale of my deeds. Dido is my name. Destinies
like mine have risen up since antiquity
with beautiful and noble words. ("Lamentación", 120)

In fact, by allowing Dido to pronounce her own destiny, Castellanos creates a
masterpiece of a poem that might appear to be a literal testimony of Mexican women’s
repressed lives. For instance, in her analysis of Castellanos’ feminist work, María Luisa
Gil Iriarte states that "Lamentación" represents simply the lives of the oppressed:

Este drama hunde sus raíces en lo más hondo del sistema de
perpetuaciones de roles impuestos por la sociedad. Dido se resigna a su
destino porque de su madre heredó los “oficios varios” y con ellos la
esencia que el logos masculino vierte en la femineidad. Por ello, la Dido
incipiente y nocturna se diluye y son los días, la imagen desde el otro, los que triunfan.

This drama sinks its roots into the deepest level of the system of perpetuation of roles imposed by society. Dido is resigned to her destiny because from her mother she inherited “various crafts” and with them the essential way of being that the masculine **logos** attributes to femininity. Hence, the image of a budding nocturnal Dido fades and what triumphs is her image in daylight, the reflection of how others see her. (Gil Iriarte 60)

Contrary to Iriarte’s views, in “Lamentación” the legend of queen Dido becomes a tool in Castellanos feminist social goals. When Castellanos writes “Lamentación”, three years after finishing **Sobre cultura femenina** in which she begins to explore Virginia Woolf’s feminist ideas that suggest that in order to obtain their own merit within patriarchal societies, women need to question first the very foundation of social contracts (**Mujer** 79).

It is true, then, as Joanna O’Connell suggests in **Prospero’s Daughter: The Prose of Rosario Castellanos**, that Castellanos’ early writings, most of all in **Sobre cultura femenina**, were the result of a male-dominated intellectual influence. This is an important point in Castellanos’ feminist trajectory, because her attempt at writing in favour of women had originally failed. The critics did not see **Sobre cultura femenina** as a condemnation of the male-dominated culture, but actually as a poor attempt of a female writer to present male philosophers’ misogynist views in an ingrained male voice (27-8).
It is with “Lamentación” that Castellanos begins to move towards what Adrienne Rich calls “reading as a woman”. Again, it is Joanna O’Connell who connects two very important concepts for contemporary literary critics with Rosario Castellanos’ work: Adrienne Rich’s *writing as re-vision* and Judith Fetterly’s *the resisting reader*. O’Connell explains Rich’s views on literature and language:

> A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name-and therefore live-afresh. (12)

O’Connell agrees that it is this new form of criticism that will motivate “a consciousness of community, and moving toward a reconstitution of community through a new relation to language and the past” (12). Additionally, O’Connell observes that Castellanos’ writing (in this case she is referring mostly to her prose) is an illustration of Fetterly’s “process as the move from immasculating to becoming a resisting reader” (13). According to Fetterly, O’Connell explains, “as readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with the male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of those central principles is misogyny” (13). The key to eradicating this male vision of the female self is “to question those loyalties and read against the grain” (13).

By allowing Virgil’s Dido to re-tell her story, Castellanos is first of all separating herself completely from the male intellectual voice, and second, she is appealing to
women to transform their own male-centered self-representation into one of their own making. Furthermore, Castellanos validates Dido’s importance in a hero’s tale, Aeneas’, by stating Dido’s self-recognition as subject of tradition rather than a victim of ignorance:

Mi cifra se grabó en la corteza del árbol enorme
de las tradiciones.

Y cada primavera, cuando el árbol retoña
es mi espíritu, no el viento sin historia, es mi espíritu
el que estremece y el que hace cantar su follaje.

My cipher was engraved in the bark of the vast tree
of traditions.

And each spring, when the tree leafs
it’s my spirit, not the wind without history, it’s my spirit
that trembles and that makes its foliage sing. (“Lamentación”, 120)

In this significant verse, Dido states that she knows that tradition has marked her destiny. Still, Castellanos immediately allows Dido to challenge those traditions. By portraying Dido as a woman conscious of her own limitations, she is altering the stereotype of the female as passive protagonist of her own life. Castellanos introduces in this verse three central images for her poem: the androgynous tree, the masculine wind and the feminine spirit. Tradition, characterized as the tree with its many parts (bark, branches, leaves, roots) can be subject to changes. Dido’s sense of identity, her “cifra” or emblem, is at this point at the surface which the male-wind is too weak to transform. It is
the feminine spirit which actually makes the tree tremble and sing; in other words, it makes it feel alive.

    Castellanos metaphorically traps classical Dido inside the bark of the tree of traditions; Aeneas, the male, becomes the wind which moves Dido, and Castellanos becomes the feminine spirit that brings about, through her poetry (singing), the self-expression of woman. This modification of another ancient story, that of Daphne and Apollo, shows Castellanos’ own literary metamorphosis. While in Ovid’s myth Daphne escapes Apollo’s sexual pursuit by being transformed into a laurel by her father (Las Metamorfosis 13), in “Lamentación” Dido knows she is part of tradition, in this case, symbolized also by a tree. In the Daphne story the laurel ends up bowing in a position of submission. To the contrary, in Castellanos’ poem Dido starts as part of the patriarchal tradition, a part that will transform that tradition since it is the female spirit that will change it. In other words, Castellanos will make this heroine give testimony of her past and present.

    By doing so, Castellanos defies the male-literary establishment by demonstrating her familiarity with its body (knowledge), while using it to conquer the branches of such tree of traditions. “Lamentación” states:

    Y para renacer, año con año,
    escojo entre los apóstrofes que me coronan, para que
    resplandezcan con un resplandor único,
    éste, que me da cierto parentesco con las playas:
    Dido, la abandonada, la que puso su corazón bajo el
    hachazo de un adiós tremendo.
And to be reborn, year after year,
I choose among the vehement callings that crown me, so that
they will shine with a unique glow,
this one, which gives me some link with the seashore:
Dido, the abandoned, the one who placed her heart under
the hacking-blow of a dreadful farewell. ("Lamentación", 120-21)

In this section Castellanos acknowledges that the story of this ancient woman has been re-told for centuries, altering and modeling the image of Western woman and, consequently, of Mexican woman as well. By choosing the voices that call her vehemently and crown her, Dido admits that often she has accepted duty, the duty that her mother passed on to her. Thus Dido symbolically sees herself as an abandoned beach only touched occasionally by the ocean. At the end, it is only the memory of the abandoned Dido that transcends in history. Thus, with these verses Castellanos refers to centuries of tale-telling to recognize that it is the story of a suffering Dido, and not of a strong, defiant queen which had long-lasting effects on the Western idea of woman.

As a matter of fact, Castellanos uses Dido’s self-portrayal as a weak, unable, and undeserving queen to mock the traditional idea of woman as the object of male subjugation:

Yo era lo que fui: mujer de investidura desproporcionada
con la flaqueza de su ánimo.

Y, sentada a la sombra de un solio inmerecido,
temblé bajo la púrpura igual que el agua tiembla
bajo el lémago.
Y para obedecer mandatos cuya incomprensibilidad me sobrepasa recorrí las baldosas de los pórticos con la balanza de la justicia entre mis manos y pesé las acciones y declaré mi consentimiento para algunas- las más graves.

I used to be what I was: a woman of investiture disproportionate to the frailty of her heart.
And, sitting by the shadow of my undeserved throne, I trembled under the royal purple like the water trembles beneath the mire.
And to obey orders which are beyond my comprehension I scoured the flagstones of the porticos with the scales of justice in my hands and I weighed deeds and I consented openly to some-of the most grievous ones. ("Lamentación", 121)

When referring to this stanza Rina Walthaus interprets its meaning at face value:

Abundan las palabras que expresan incapacidad, debilidad: 'mujer de investidura desproporcionada con la flaqueza de su ánimo', 'solio inmerecido', 'temblé', 'mandatos cuya incomprensibilidad me sobrepasa'.
Frente a la Dido virgiliana que ‘iura dabat legesque viris’, (Eneida, I, 507) nos la presenta Castellanos como una mujer que, ‘con la balanza de la justicia entre mis manos’, realiza sus tareas sin comprender.

There abound words that express incapability, weakness: ‘woman of investiture disproportionate to the frailty of her heart,’ ‘undeserved throne,’ ‘I trembled,’ ‘orders which are beyond my comprehension’.

Against the Virgilian Dido that ‘iura dabat legesque viris,’ (Aeneid, I, 507), Castellanos presents a woman that ‘with the scale of justice between my hands,’ fulfils her duties without comprehension. (136)

Walthaus fails to perceive the great irony behind Castellanos’ words. By mockingly portraying Dido as an apologetic, unintelligent, undeserving queen, Castellanos is actually judging Dido’s critics, rather than portraying her as inferior.

One of the most notable literary characteristics in Castellanos’ writing is the use of ironic discourse. According to Jonathan Tittler in his book *Narrative Irony in the Contemporary Spanish-American Novel*:

Verbal irony can arise only in a social context, for it is a product of intersubjective communication. Furthermore, in order for a dissembling

---

21 Jonathan Tittler isolates two moments in “irony”: subjective and objective. For him “there are also two types of objective irony, that are commonly called intended irony (most often verbal) and another termed accidental irony (alternatively, irony “events”). Roughly put, intended irony is that figure of speech in which the speaker’s words have meaning not totally in consonance with (often the opposite of, often more significant
ironist not to deceive altogether (since no irony results if the literal meaning of a locution is not rejected) the parties involved must accept a common frame of values. The “victim” of verbal irony must therefore be a potential ironist as well and already embody the duplicity necessary to identify that of the ironist. As Kenneth Burke, who has perhaps most clearly seen irony’s cooperative dimension, puts it: ‘True irony, humble irony, is based upon a sense of fundamental kinship with the enemy, as one needs him, is indebted to him, is not merely outside him’ (18).

For Castellanos, those who failed to appreciate Dido’s significance in the ancient story are inferior. When Castellanos starts this stanza with the words: ‘I used to be what I was,’ she is telling her audience that the story of Dido became, through centuries of retelling, a myth within a myth and not the story intended by Virgil of a strong queen, an equal to Aeneas. Thus, Castellanos, as Virgil was in his time, would be misread if one was to believe that she intended to portray Dido as the symbol of weakness.

Castellanos, therefore, reinstates Dido’s ancient strength when she describes Dido as ‘scouring the flagstones of the porticos with the scales of justice in my hands.’ By making allusion to Diogenes Laercio of Sinope — the famous cynic (c.412-c.323B.C.)

than) their straightforward literal sense. Accidental irony refers to a paradoxical circumstance, one that is contrary to expectations or to reason itself. Subject irony is normally understood to refer to the state of mind induced by objective irony, either intended or accidental. *Narrative Irony in the Contemporary Spanish-American Novel*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984, 18.
who is depicted carrying a lantern with which he is said to have searched in vain until
daylight for an honest man—. Castellanos has given Dido the strength to carry on
difficult choices. In the final lines of this stanza, with Dido, like Diogenes, looking for
justice when she knowingly had to make harmful choices, Castellanos is about to tell
Dido’s story from a female point of view. Castellanos then interweaves in the next two
stanzas the Mexican female experience and Dido’s ancient story:

   Esto era en el día. Durante la noche no la copa del
   festín, no la alegría de la serenata, no el sueño deleitoso.
   Sino los ojos acechando en la oscuridad, la inteligencia
   batiendo la selva intricada de los textos
   para cobrar la presa que huye entre las páginas.
   Y mis oídos, habituados a la ardua polémica de los mentores,
   llegaron a ser hábiles para distinguir el robusto sonido del oro
   del estrépito estéril con que entrechocan los guijarros.

   This was during the day. During the night, not
   the glass of feast, the joy of the serenade, the delightful sleep.
   Instead my eyes pried the darkness, my intelligence beat the impenetrable
   forest of the text in order to capture the prey that
   escapes between the pages.

---

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Diogenes of Sinope. The Internet encyclopedia of Philosophy.} Anonymous 2005. Sept.

2005 <http: www.utm.edu/research/lep/d/diogsino.htm>
And my ears, accustomed to the mentors’ harsh debates
became skillful at distinguishing the robust sound of gold
from the barren noise which pebbles make when they collide.

("Lamentación", 121)

The Mexican female experience has two elements in this section of the poem:
first, an analogy to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and second, the Native cultural tradition
that Castellanos embeds in Dido’s story. María Luisa Gil Iriarte, in her article “Invasión
del silencio: La voz de la mujer en la poesía de Rosario Castellanos” (1996), compares
Dido with Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, stating that here Dido is depicted in search of
knowledge in the same way that Sor Juana expressed her intellectual struggle in her
Primero sueño. It is true that some parts of “Lamentación” show stylistic and linguistic
characteristics from the Spanish Baroque, which we will discuss as they appear in the
poem. In the case of this stanza, it is necessary to discuss Sor Juana’s Primero sueño to
understand why Iriarte asserts that “la Dido nocturna es una suerte de Sor Juana en
contienda intelectual” (the nocturnal Dido is a sort of Sor Juana in an intellectual
struggle) (181). To support her affirmation Iriarte observes that “las imágenes que
descubrimos en esta lectura nos conectan de inmediato con El sueño de Juana de
Asbaje’s El sueño) (181), which Iriarte explains in Giuseppe Bellini’s words:
En el drama de la soledad intelectual sorjuaniana como se expresa en el
*Primer sueño*, encuentra reflejos del drama del existir mexicano, que tanto
ha atormentado y atormenta a la intelectualidad del país.

In the drama of Sor Juana’s intellectual solitude as it is expressed in
*Primer sueño*, there are reflections of the drama of Mexican existence, that
so much has tormented and still torments the nation’s intellectuals. (181)

Iriarte’s connection of Dido with Sor Juana refers to the following lines:

“Durante la noche, no la copa del/ festín, no la alegria de la serenata, no el sueño
deleitoso./ Sino los ojos acechando en la oscuridad, la inteligencia/batiendo la selva
intricada de los textos/ para cobrar la presa que huye entre las páginas.” Iriarte seems to
impose post-modern criteria on Castellanos’ mid-Twentieth-century perception of woman
and of the Mexican intellectual woman.

Iriarte emphasizes that “La otra Dido, es la Dido nocturna, la que halla su
identidad” (181). I would like to suggest that Dido, as presented by Castellanos, knows
her identity. That is exactly what makes this poem so rich because it shows the
complexity of Mexican women’s lives, with their many facets. Hence, when Castellanos
asserts that Dido dared to look for knowledge in the subversive world of darkness,
Castellanos is revealing the centuries-old reality of women. Women, in Castellanos view,
have been pretending, during the day, to conform to the model imposed on them as
domestic and enclosed. At night, they seek knowledge away from public scrutiny by the
hierarchies that control society: Family, Church and State.

It is rather simplistic to compare Castellanos’ Dido with Sor Juana. First of all,
*Primer sueño* has been recognized as Sor Juana’s most accomplished literary work. In
her poem, Sor Juana is not ashamed of showing her knowledge. She is not hiding in order to write or to learn. Sor Juana’s choice of a life in the cloister in order to learn does not compare to the choice of women who had to hide in order to write or study. As the most famous nun of 17th Century New Spain, Sor Juana definitely did not seek darkness in order to accomplish her intellectual dreams. As Octavio Paz explains in his study of Sor Juana (Las Trampas 467-507), Primero sueño is a poem that talks about the soul reaching a higher sphere of being, that one of mystic erudition:

...nos cuenta cómo, mientras dormía el cuerpo, el alma ascendió a la esfera superior; allá tuvo una visión de tal modo intensa, vasta y luminosa, que la deslumbró y la cegó; repuesta de su ofuscamiento, quiso subir de nuevo, ahora peldaño por peldaño, pero no pudo; cuando dudaba sobre qué otro camino tomar; salió el sol y el cuerpo despertó. El poema es el relato de una visión espiritual que termina en una no-visión.

Con Primero sueño principia una actitud- la confrontación del alma solitaria ante el universo- que más tarde desde el romanticismo, será el eje espiritual de la poesía de Occidente.

...it tells us how, while the body slept, the soul rose to a higher sphere; there she had a vision so intense, vast and bright, that it dazzled and blinded her; recovered from her obfuscation she tried to go up again, this time step by step, but she couldn’t; while she doubted which other course to take; the sun rose and the body woke up. The poem is the tale of a spiritual vision that ends as a non-vision.
With *Primero sueño* a new outlook begins--the confrontation of the solitary soul before the Universe--that later, starting with Romanticism, would become the spiritual axis of Western poetry. (482)

Furthermore, Paz says that according to José Gaos' *El sueño de un sueño*, in *Primero sueño* Sor Juana questions the correlation between being female and the difficulties she encountered in her quest for knowledge. Paz explains about Gaos:

Según el profesor español, “sor Juana no filosofó en verso sobre los límites del conocimiento humano […] sino sobre la experiencia capital de su fracaso del afán de saber”. Y agrega: “¿Es un fracaso del afán de saber de una mujer por ser mujer o por ser la mujer que ella es?”

According to the Spanish professor, “Sor Juana did not philosophize in verse about the limitations of human knowledge […] but rather about the capital experience of her failure in her quest for knowledge.” And, he adds: “Is it a failure in the quest of knowledge of a woman for being a woman or for being the woman that she was? (Paz 497)

Paz explains that Gaos fails to clarify if such “feminine impediment” is natural or imposed by social customs. Consequently, Paz’s knowledge of Sor Juana’s life and works allows him to conclude that:

Los textos de sor Juana dicen claramente que ella no creía que ser mujer fuese un impedimento natural: el obstáculo venia de las costumbres no de la condición femenina. Por eso recurre a la religión: para neutralizar el impedimento social. Y hay algo más: el protagonista de *Primero sueño*
no es el alma femenina sino el alma humana que, hay que repetirlo, para la autora no tiene sexo. El impedimento no es su feminidad sino ser el alma prisionera del cuerpo. El fracaso no viene de su sexo sino de los límites del entendimiento humano [...] Sor Juana sí reflexionó sobre los límites de la razón: este es el tema de su poema y uno de los ejes de su vida interior.

The texts of Sor Juana clearly state that she did not believe that to be a woman was a natural impediment: the obstacle came from custom and not from the feminine condition. That is why she resorts to religion in order to neutralize the social impediment. And there is something more: the protagonist of Primero sueño is not the feminine soul, but rather the human soul that, it must be repeated, for the author it had no gender. The impediment is not its femininity, but the soul’s imprisonment in the body. The failure does not come from her gender, but rather from the limits of human understanding. […] Sor Juana, indeed reflected about the limitations of reason: this was the theme of her poem and one of the axis of her inner life. (497)

One of the differences between Sor Juana and Castellanos’ Dido is that Sor Juana did not hide her erudition, as proved by her many writings and public debates with numerous intellectuals of her time, while Dido does. Most important, Sor Juana, if one is to accept Paz’s interpretation of her poem, concluded that the main impediment to learning was imposed by oneself. That is, true limitation is the soul’s incarceration by the
physical body; therefore, freedom can be only achieved through the transcendental liberation of the spirit: an androgynous spirit.

Castellanos’ Dido, however, as the stanza that Gil Iriarte links directly to Sor Juana’s Primero sueño shows, does not feel limited either in spirit or in the physical sense. Although it is true that Dido seeks knowledge in the darkness of the night, she seeks it nonetheless. Therefore, Dido is already transgressing her role as a woman, as the poem proves. Such knowledge gives Dido the ability “para distinguir el robusto sonido del oro del estrépito estéril con que entrechocan los guijarros” (to distinguish the robust sound of gold from the barren noise which pebbles make when they collide). As Paz concludes about Primero sueño: “el acto de conocer es una transgresión” (the act of learning is a transgression) (504). The difference between Dido and Sor Juana, however, is that Dido’s learning is concealed, while Sor Juana’s is not, Sor Juana proves her erudition by challenging learned men of her time in intellectual public debates, while Castellanos’ Dido pretends not to learn, just as the Brontës and Jane Austen pretended not to be writers in 19th century England.

Also, contrary to Sor Juana’s sense of identity, Dido’s spirit, as mentioned earlier in this study, is most definitely feminine and not androgynous. For Castellanos uncovers an eternal truth about women: they pretend to be inferior against more powerful forces in society since they are fully aware of the dangers they face if they transgress carelessly. Castellanos is revealing women’s centuries-old insight, in her next stanza, by placing women as the shapers of tradition:

De mi madre, que no desdénó mis manos y que me las

ungió desde el amanecer con la destreza,
heredé oficios varios: cargadora de lana, escogedora
del fruto que ilustra la estación y su clima,
despabiladora de lámparas.
Así pues tomé la rienda de mis días: potros domados
conocedores del camino, reconocedores de la querencia.
Así pues ocupé mi sitio en la asamblea de los mayores.
Y a la hora de la partición comí apaciblemente el
pan que habían amasado mis deudos.
Y con frecuencia sentí deshacerse entre mi boca el grano
de sal de un acontecimiento dichoso.
From my mother, who did not disdain my hands but anointed
them from the beginning with the gift of dexterity
I inherited various arts: wool-carder, picker
of the best fruit for the season and the climate,
keeper of the lamps.
That is how I took control of my days:
colts tamed into knowing the road and recognizing the longing.
That is how I took my place in the elders' assembly.
And at the moment of the sharing I ate placidly
the bread that my relatives had kneaded.
And frequently I felt melting in my mouth
the grain of salt of a joyful event. ("Lamentación", 121-22)
Some scholars who have analyzed “Lamentación” focus on this stanza, most of all the lines: “De mi madre que no desdénó mis manos…heredé oficios varios…” For example, Naomi Lindstrom (1980) explains that Dido presents a more modern and feminist view of herself and her own role as woman. Lindstrom critiques the whole poem in the following brief paragraph:

Dido speaks as a woman with a feminist awareness of the gulf between her lover’s open life experience and her own closed upbringing: “De mi madre, que no desdénó mis manos y que me ungió desde el amanecer con la destreza- heredé oficios varios; cargadora de lana, escogedora del fruto que ilustra la estación y su clima- despabiladora de lámparas.” By making the lamentation, that a woman who conceives of herself as a woman rather than a queen, and of her lover as a man rather than a special, questing hero, Castellanos has made the epic tale relevant to all encounters between women and men. The Dido poem is feminist not only in the creation of a Dido who is aware of sex role inequalities, but also in the inclusion, again, of the feminine-trivial: the transmission from mother to daughter of housewifely skills. (72)

In this powerful overview of “Lamentación”, Lindstrom acknowledges Castellanos’ desire to challenge the trivialization of women’s “arts” passed on from mothers to daughters. Still, by concluding that Dido’s story is “an epic tale relevant to all encounters between women and men”, Lindstrom grants more importance to the love affair than to the underlying issues that seem to concern Castellanos. At this point in Castellanos’ feminist literary trajectory, the poet does not intend to make of her writing
exclusively a quest for the private, but rather, to become one of the primary voices of the public woman.

In 1953, Castellanos’ main concern remained on the lives of the most marginalized group of society: rural women, who like herself during her childhood, were their brothers’ “loot”. This is the real men-women struggle, and not so much the romantic one, even when in “Lamentación” there are traces of Aeneas and Dido’s love affair. In fact, the love affair takes a secondary role to Castellanos’ primary argument of women’s right for recognition within their social base, a recognition that implied part of women’s quest for knowledge.

In addition, when Castellanos says in “Lamentación”: “de mi madre yo heredé oficios varios”, she is referring solely to the indigenous women of Chiapas. This is proven in the next stanza where she clearly enumerates the arts and crafts that shape the roles of women in one of the poorest states in Mexico. As Soledad González Montes explains in “Mujeres, trabajo y pobreza en el campo mexicano: una revisión crítica de la bibliografía reciente”:

Uno de los aspectos que más ha preocupado a quienes se interesan por la situación de las mujeres, es el hecho de que en todas las culturas la división sexual del trabajo asigna a las mujeres la esfera doméstica y las actividades ligadas a su manutención y reproducción. La especificidad de esas actividades varía de una cultura a otra.

En el campo mexicano, por lo general, incluyen la crianza de los hijos, el cuidado del huerto y los animales domésticos-cuando los hay-, la participación en la agricultura familiar, el procesamiento de la producción,
la preparación de los alimentos, etc. La línea divisoria entre lo que es “trabajo productivo” (en el sentido de que produce ingresos en dinero) y el “trabajo de reproducción” (que produce valores de uso, “para autoconsumo).

...[E]l trabajo doméstico no es reconocido como trabajo, y por lo tanto no es valorado socialmente ni retribuido como tal. A esto es lo que se ha llamado “la invisibilización” del trabajo femenino, que en la literatura feminista aparece como una de las bases de la subordinación femenina.

One of the aspects that has preoccupied those who are interested in the living conditions of women, is the fact that in all cultures the gender division of labour allocates the domestic sphere and activities linked to maintenance and reproduction to women. The specificity of such activities varies from one culture to another.

In rural Mexico, it includes, generally, raising children, caring of the farming plot and domestic animals- if there are any-, participation in the family’s agricultural activity, processing of production preparation of food, etc. Here we find the dividing line between what is “productive labour” (in the sense that it produces monetary income) and “reproductive labour” (that which produces goods for consumption, self-consumption).

Domestic labour is not recognized as labour; therefore, it is neither valued socially nor compensated as such. This is what has been called “the invisibility” of women’s labour, that in feminist literature appears as one of the basis of female subjugation. (204-5)
It is during this time that Castellanos worked directly as a crucial link between white/mestizo and indigenous Chiapas. She testified to this with her books *Balún Canán* (1957), *Ciudad Real* (1960), and *Oficio de Tinieblas* (1962). Entrusted by the Mexican Writer's Center (1953) with a study on the contribution of women to Mexican culture, as well as being a winner of a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation (1954-55) which enabled her to write *Balún Canán* (Ahern Reading 3) Castellanos' preoccupations shifted, for about ten years, from solely gender hierarchies to gender-race and class relations. Castellanos most certainly transgressed into one of the most guarded of male territories: the literary canon. By achieving recognition as a female writer, she broke the boundaries of those very feminine traditions she challenged in her work.

Rina Walthaus, nine years after Lindstrom’s analysis of “Lamentación” also tries to understand Castellanos’ vision of what Walthaus perceives as “any Mexican woman”:

Su elevada [de Dido] función social y civil no la exime de otras faenas de tipo doméstico: la reina es, además, mujer. Es la madre la que le transmite a la hija las tradicionales labores femeninas como a cualquier mujer mexicana: [...].

Su formación y su condicionamiento como reina y mujer honesta (‘Así pues tomé las riendas de mis días: potros domados, conocedores del camino, reconocedores de la querencia’) le traen cierto equilibrio por la rutina diaria, la monotonía, que se refleja fónicamente en las anáforas utilizadas...

Dido’s high civic and social function does not exempt her from other domestic duties: the queen is also a woman. It is the mother the one who transmits to the daughter the traditional feminine labors as it is done to all Mexican women [...].
Her shaping and conditioning as queen and an honest woman (‘That is how I took control of my days: Colts tamed into knowing the road and recognizing the longing’) bring unto her a certain balance from the daily routine, the monotony, that shows phonically in the anaphors used. (136)

In this analysis of “Lamentación,” Walthaus sees Dido first as queen, and, then as woman. For Walthaus, queen Dido submits to the labours of “any woman,” helping her eliminate the monotony of her daily life. However, Castellanos is not critical of the customs of indigenous women. When Walthaus characterizes queen Dido as “queen and honest” and refers to her as “finding balance from her daily routine,” she is falling into a discourse that undermines the value of aspects of the lives of women which Castellanos does not elaborate at this point. Castellanos, as she proved in Balún Canán, Ciudad Real and Oficio de Tinieblas, exalted the realities of these indigenous peoples without falling into the paternalistic attitudes of many academics. She wanted to present the people of rural Mexico as they were and not as the official social hierarchies wanted to see and portray them.

Finally in 1999, Gil Iriarte sees Dido also as submissive to her fate: “Dido se resigna a su destino porque de su madre heredó ‘los oficios varios’ y con ello la esencia que el logos masculino vierte en la femineidad” (Dido surrenders herself to her destiny because from her mother she inherited ‘various arts’ and with that the essence that the male logos pours into her femininity) (182). In this quotation, Iriarte describes a Dido who has surrendered to her fate as woman, a woman as man sees her. Thus, Iriarte contradicts her previous understanding of Dido, since Dido cannot seek knowledge like Sor Juana and at the same time surrendered to her fate. Seeking knowledge is to
transgress not to resign. Equally, when in the poem Dido says: “That is how I took my place in the elders assembly”, Castellanos places Dido among the members of the “elders assembly” just like Judith was in the Old Testament (Jerusalem Bible 628-639). Again, by placing Castellanos’ poetry within the context of her literary trajectory, one can see how between 1953 and 1959 she had explored some very powerful feminine archetypes as models of Western tradition. One such archetype is Judith, to whom Castellanos dedicates a lengthy dramatic poem in 1959.

The Bible tells the ancient story of Judith, the female savior of the Jewish people from King Holofernes (622-639). According to the story, Judith, a respected Jewish widow,\(^{23}\) pleads to the “elders” not to mistrust God’s wishes,\(^{24}\) and to keep the true faith so that they (her townsfolk) will defeat Holofernes:

\(^{23}\) “As a widow, Judith stayed inside her home for three years and four months. She had had an upper room built for her on the roof. She wore sackcloth round her waist and dressed in widow’s needs. She fasted everyday of her widowhood except for the Sabbath eve, the Sabbath itself, the eve of the New Moon, the feast of the New Moon and the festival days of the House of Israel. Now, she was very beautiful, charming to see. Her husband Manasseh had left her gold and silver, menservants and maidservants, cattle and lands; and she lived among all her possessions, without anyone finding a word to say against her, so devoutly did she fear God,” “Judith”, 628-29.

\(^{24}\) Listen to me, leaders of the people of Bethulia [...] who are you, to put God to the test today, you out of all mankind, to set yourselves above him? [...] You do not understand anything, and never will. If you cannot sound the depths of the heart of man unravel the
Judith joins her compatriots in a national examination of conscience, which acquits them of the idolatry long since denounced by the prophets but not rooted out until the period of the second Temple (629).

Even more so than Judith in the Old Testament, Dido exemplifies for Castellanos the wisdom of women. While learning from her mother the basic skills for her livelihood, she still can be an integral part of the upper echelons of the hierarchy of her class and race. That is why Dido accepts what her family teaches her, without being oblivious to her subversive power within the clan. Dido waits, indeed; she waits for her turn to claim her rightful position:

Pero no dilapidé mi lealtad. La atesoraba para el tiempo
de las lamentaciones,
para cuando los cuervos aletean encima de los tejados
y mancillan la transparencia del cielo con su graznido
fúnebre;
para cuando la desgracia entra en la puerta
principal de las mansiones

arguments of his mind, how can you fathom the God who made all things, or sound his mind or unravel his purposes? No, brothers, do not provoke the anger of the Lord our God. Although it may not be his will to help us within the next five days, he has the power to protect us for as many days as he pleases, just as he has the power to destroy us before our enemies. But you have no right to demand guarantees where the designs of the Lord our God are concerned,” “Judith”, 629.
y se la recibe con el mismo respeto que a una reina.

But I did not squander my loyalty. I treasured it
for the time of laments,
for the time when the crows flutter their wings above the tiled roofs
and stain the transparent sky with their lugubrious cawing
for the time when misfortune enters through
the mansion’s front door
and is welcomed like a queen. (“Lamentación”, 122)

In this stanza, as in the next two, Castellanos is preparing her audience for
Aeneas’ entrance. So far, he has not been present. The description of Dido’s life has been
center stage in the poem. The complexity of Dido’s character has been defined so far by
the complexity of the poem. Dido is many things for many people, and for Castellanos
she represents the struggle between the private and the public, because woman cannot
remain in the private sphere forever. She must transgress into the public stage in order to
seek power. Therefore, with this verse, Dido recognizes the signs of the tragedy to come.
The lugubrious darkness in the sky filled with ominous crows brings upon her dread. It is
with this increasing literary intensity that Castellanos exalts the importance of Dido’s
tale.

In the next two stanzas Castellanos summarizes the first half of the poem that
deals with the private Dido. With the symbol of the “blaze,” Castellanos blends Dido’s
two worlds, the private with the public:

De este modo transcurrió mi mocedad: en el cumplimiento
de las menudas tareas domésticas, en la celebración de los ritos cotidianos, en la asistencia a los solemnes acontecimientos civiles.

Y yo dormía, reclinando mi cabeza sobre una almohada de confianza.
Así la llanura, dilatándose, puede creer en la benevolencia de su sino, porque ignora que la extensión no es más que la pista donde corre, como un atleta vencedor, enrojecido por el heroísmo supremo de su esfuerzo, la llama del incendio.

This is how my youth elapsed: performing trifling domestic chores and daily rites; attending solemn civic events.

And I so would sleep, leaning my head over a pillow of trust.
That is how the plain as it stretches on can believe in the benevolence of its fate because it ignores that its own expanse is no more than a track where the flame of a blaze runs like a victorious
athlete with his face aglow with heroic effort. ("Lamentación", 122)

By switching the importance given to the private and the public worlds of women, Castellanos tries to convey the notion that women are also political; therefore, they must embrace their public persona. The poem introduces the public Dido and then, when Aeneas emerges after the first half of the poem, Castellanos introduces her audience to the private Dido. Castellanos encourages her female audience to challenge tradition through Dido's perception of her own life.

As was explained before, Joanna O'Connell recognizes Castellanos' ability to retreat from the misogynist teachings of earlier male scholars by becoming a resisting reader herself. Castellanos’ "Lamentación" becomes a primary example of such process. Even for O'Connell, "Lamentación" is an exemplification, along with "Judith" and "Salomé," of Castellanos’ "recognition of the necessity and power of re-reading as a woman" (68).

O'Connell summarizes in 1996 her views on "Lamentación" as "a woman's perspective in a love story" (68), and just as Marilynn Desmond contends in 1994, O'Connell sees Dido as "one of many women in Virgil's poem who represent a threat to the foundation of the nation" (68). Even if O'Connell did not read Desmond, it is possible that a feminist "re-reading" of the Aeneid brought about the unanimous conclusion that Dido had become, according to male scholars' views, an obstacle to Aeneas' quest, rather than the heroine that Virgil might have originally intended her to be" (Stanley 7-8).

Before Castellanos presents Aeneas to her audience, she makes sure that Dido's depiction emphasizes the purpose of the poem: to reverse the gender hierarchies enforced throughout centuries of literary tradition. Castellanos transforms Dido into the primary
character of the story by allocating her the first half of the poem; the totalization of
Dido’s inner desires becomes the conclusion of the poem’s first half. Aeneas, as the
blaze, appears for the first time and becomes the catalyst of both public and private Dido:

Y el incendio vino a mí, la predación, la ruina, el exterminio

And the blaze reached me, predator, ruin, exterminator ("Lamentación”,
123)

“Lamentación” is a modern cry about the traditions imposed on Mexican women.
Yet, what makes this poem unique in its complexity is the diversity of traditions that
Castellanos blends as part of a strong metaphorical message on civilization, culture and
society. By starting the second half of the poem with the ancient image of a castaway and
his hostess, Castellanos searches for meaning through the most ancient female-male
relationships:

¡Y no he dicho el amor!, en figura de náufrago.

Esto que el mar rechaza, dije, es mío.

Y ante él me adorné de la misericordia como del
brazalete de más precio.

Yo te conjuro, si oyes, a que respondas: ¿quién esquivó
la adversidad alguna vez? ¿Y quién tuvo a desnudo
llamarle huésped suya y preparar la sala del
convite?
Quien lo hizo no es mi igual. Mi lenguaje se entronca con el de los inmoladores de sí mismos.

El cuchillo bajo el que se quebró mi cerviz era un hombre llamado Eneas.

Aquel Eneas, aquel, piadoso con los suyos solamente; acogido a la fortaleza de muros extranjeros; astuto, con astucias de bestia perseguida; invocador de números favorables; hermoso narrador de infortunios y hombre de paso; hombre con el corazón puesto en el futuro.

I have not said love!, in the shape of a castaway.

This thing that the sea rejects, I said, is mine. And before him I donned compassion like the most precious bracelet.

I entreat you, if you hear me, to respond: whoever succeeded in avoiding adversity? And who would find it a disgrace to be called her guest and to have the feasting-hall prepared for him?
Whosoever would is not my equal. My discourse is related to the discourse of the immolators of themselves.

The knife under which my neck was shattered was a man called Aeneas.

That Aeneas, that one, merciful only to his own.

sheltered by the fortress of foreign walls; cunning, with all the guiles of a hunted beast;

he who invokes favourable goals; elegant teller of misfortunes and transient; a man

with his heart set in the future. ("Lamentación", 123)

To present Aeneas as a castaway is not only to follow in Virgil's classical footsteps, but also to scrutinize the idea of women as objects of tradition as Castellanos underlines it in earlier stanzas. First, Castellanos is challenging traditions of domesticity that were imposed by the ancient peoples of Mexico on her female contemporaries.

Second, she is also challenging the European literary traditions which have influenced the Western collective consciousness for centuries. Third, Castellanos' preoccupation during this time with the racial and gender conflicts in her native Chiapas resulted in a unique insight into why Mexican women of her time felt they were forced to follow tradition.

Finally, Castellanos begins to follow the paths of feminist female thinkers such as Woolf and Beauvoir who had already challenged the literary canon with their views on the status of British and French women in the first half of the 20th Century. When Castellanos
declares: “de mi madre heredé oficios varios”, besides referring to the Indigenous women of Chiapas, she is revealing a hidden message. “Inheriting the arts” is suddenly a metaphor for the mother, for literature as a molding force as much of language as of the collective memory of a people.

Castellanos believed that “words” were the sacred component of language and literature that unfortunately had been misused as a tool for social and cultural subjugation. As she expresses it in her essay “Notas al margen: el lenguaje como instrumento de dominio” (Notes on the Margin: Language as an Instrument of Domination):

La palabra es la flecha que da en “su” blanco. Sustituirla por otra es traicionar a la cosa que aspiraba a ser representada plena y fielmente, con nitidez, con precisión y no a que se le esbozara a grandes rasgos confusos, con la brocha gorda del pintor de burlas.

La palabra, que es única, es, al mismo tiempo y por eso mismo, gregaria. Al surgir convoca la presencia de todas las otras que le son afines, con las que la atan lazos de sangre, asociaciones lícitas, y constituye familias, constelaciones, estructuras.

Pueden ser complejas, pueden regirse por un orden que produzca placer en el contemplador. Lo que ya no les está permitido volver a ser nunca es gratuitas. Las palabras han sido dotadas de sentido y el que las maneja profesionalmente no está facultado para despojarlas de ese sentido sino al contrario, comprometido a evidenciarlo, a hacerlo patente en cada instante, en cada instancia.
El sentido de la palabra es su destinatario: el otro que escucha, que entiende y que, cuando responde, convierte a su interlocutor en el que escucha y en el que entiende, estableciendo así la relación del diálogo que sólo es posible entre quienes se consideran y se tratan como iguales y que sólo es fructífero entre quienes se quieren libres.

A word is the arrow that hits “its” target. To substitute it for another is to betray the thing that hoped to be represented totally and faithfully, with clarity, with precision, not to be pictured with confused wide strokes by a mocking painter.

A word, that is unique, is, at the same time and for the same reason, gregarious. Emerging it conjures all the others that are alike, with which it is tied by blood ties, lyric associations, and it creates families, constellations, structures.

They can be complex; they can be ruled by an order that produces pleasure in the observer. They are never allowed to be gratuitous. Words have been granted meaning and he who manages them professionally is not authorized to strip them of their meaning; but rather, he or she has to make their meaning clear at each instance, and each moment.

The meaning of the word is its recipient: the other who listens, understands and that, when he or she answers, turns his or her interlocutor into the one who listens and understands, establishing that way the relationship of the dialogue that is only possible among those who
consider themselves equal and that can only be fructiferous among those who wish themselves free. *(Mujer 174-75)*

If, as Castellanos suggests, *la palabra* can actually manipulate the way language is used in order to dominate or subjugate, then it is important to analyze the cultural *significance* of such hegemony forged through centuries. It is important to view two literary traditions that are represented explicitly in “Lamentación” and that clearly were part of Castellanos intellectual foundation. These two traditions are closely related to “the castaway” (Aeneas), his relationship to the “hostess” (Dido), and the ancient tradition of hospitality. One of those literary traditions comes from Homer’s *Odyssey*. Most critics suggest that Virgil’s great admiration for the Greek poet enticed him to write *The Aeneid*.

According to Stanley Pease, the incident between Calypso and Odysseus (12), reflects most closely the story of Dido and Aeneas:

> In it, the hero is cast by a storm upon an unknown land, received and delayed by a woman who falls in love with him, though he is somewhat insensible to her charms and is released by Hermes sent by Zeus at the instigation of Athena. (12)

However, the chapter about Calypso and Odysseus is more than a love story, as Richmond Lattimore explains in his introduction to Homer’s *Odyssey* (15): although Odysseus’ wanderings do not represent the story of Man, but of a man, they do “lend themselves to a morality, for it is easy to read the adventures as a series of trials” (15).

For the purpose of this study, however, the trials of Odysseus or Aeneas as heroes are not the focus, but rather their relations as castaway men to their respective hostesses.
Book I where Odysseus encounters Kalypso (Calypso) matters to us as a tale of morality:

For the poet seems mostly to have seen the moral issue as just right against wrong. The sin of the faithless maids and of the one faithless thrall is disloyalty. The sin of the suitors is perhaps this, too, but they also abuse hospitality.

For Homer, perhaps because he was a wandering poet, this virtue is thematic, and again and again we are given object lessons on the right dealings between host and guest, through the conduct of Telemachos, Nestor and his family, Menelaos and a reformed Helen, the Phaiakians, Odysseus, Kalypso, Penelope. [...] The suitors are aware of the principle [...] but in action they are living travesty of all proper custom. Thus they lose all divine favor (17).

A careful reading of the lines in “Lamentación” where Aeneas first appears as a castaway (79-83), and Dido as his obligated hostess reveals that Castellanos, for the first time, presents Dido as subject to adversity-destiny. Dido’s cry in helpless anguish becomes a condemnation of ancient practices, Greek and Roman, which stigmatized the denial of shelter and food to a guest. If Homer, as suggested by Lattimore, was a “wandering poet (17),” he must have encountered numerous situations where he needed shelter. It is not surprising then that the theme of hospitality became one of his major preoccupations.

When Pease compares the encounter between Aeneas and Dido directly
to the episode between Calypso and Odysseus, it is because being embraced by a charming hostess like Calypso is Odysseus’ most threatening obstacle in his journey (Book I 13-15). For Pease, the complexities of the relations between guest and hostess become secondary. However, if Homer’s readers transformed this tale of temptation offered by a hostess into a precedent on gender relations for Greek and, consequently, Western civilizations, the crucial episode between Aeneas and Dido in Book IV of the *Aeneid* only reinforces such prejudice.

Ironically, the genders of guest and host are interchanged in the first example of such relations. In Book I, Athena, the warrior goddess, is the guest and Telemachus is the host. It is their treatment of each other that sets the standard for future encounters. Therefore, it is a man, after all, who establishes the unique tradition of never sending away an unfortunate wanderer:

> With such thought, sitting among the suitors, he saw Athena
> and went straight to the forecourt, the heart within him scandalized
> that a guest should still be standing at the doors. He stood beside her
> and took her by the right hand, and relieved her by the bronze spear,
> and spoke to her and addressed her in winged words:
> ‘Welcome, stranger. You shall be entertained as a guest
> among us. Afterward, when you have tasted dinner, you
> shall tell us what your need is (30).’

Castellanos also takes into consideration other literary traditions. As her poetic style itself in “Lamentación” testifies, Castellanos follows the Spanish Baroque as the main literary tradition for her poem. It is by using the complexity of Luis de Góngora’s
*cultismo* in “Lamentación” that she approximates Dido’s story to the Mexican Iberian heritage as well. As mentioned before, Castellanos sets herself to condemn “tradition” for all those repressive attitudes and idiosyncrasies imposed on Mexican society; still, she does not ban tradition from her poem. To the contrary, by using those very same traditions imposed on her as an author, she makes of her poem, ironically, a metaphor for cultural heritage.

Castellanos’ immense scrutiny of why certain models of behavior were so strongly imposed on Mexican women had led her towards an intrinsic examination of her literary heritage. It is true that the Baroque is not solely represented by Luis de Góngora (1561-1627); however, his famous *Soledades* and *El Polifemo* place themselves most closely to the exploration of the tradition of hospitality, from which there are a few instances, for example; from *The Polifemo*:

(55)

En tablas dividida, rica nave
besó la playa miserablemente,
de cuantas vomitó riquezas grave,
por las bocas del Nilo el Oriente.
Yugo aquel día, y yugo bien suave,
del fiero mar a la sañuda frente
imponiéndole estaba (si no el viento
dulcísimas coyundas) mi instrumento (273),
‘Once a tall vessel, which the waves had rent
To Splinters, lamentably kissed the strand,
Big with those riches which the Orient
Spews from the mouths of Nile to every land.
While with its yoke that day my instrument,
An easy yoke indeed, strove to command
The stubborn forehead of the angry seas,
Or with still gentler chains to bind the breeze,\(^{25}\)

(56)
cuando, entre globos de agua, entregar veo
da las arenas ligurina haya,
en cajas los aromas del Sabeo,
en cofres las riquezas de Cambaya:
delicias de aquel mundo, ya trofeo
de Escila, que, ostentando en nuestra playa,
lastimoso despojo fue dos días
a las que esta montaña engendra arpías (273).

‘Over the sand, among the boiling spray,

I saw the doomed Ligurian timbers pour
Coffers that held the riches of Cambay,
Caskets that guarded Sheba's fragrant store:
Spoils of the Indies, now the vaunted prey
Of Scylla, and a pageant for the shore-
For two short days the piteous remnants feed
The ravenous harpies which our mountains breed.  

(58)

arco, digo, gentil, bruñida aljaba,
obras ambas de artífice prolijo,
y de Malaco rey a deidad Java
alto don, según ya mi huésped dijó (278).

"The handsome bow and burnished quiver were
Works of laborious skill, which once had been
Made for Malacca's king, a present rare,
My guest asserted, for a Javan queen."

From *Soledad Primera*:

---

26 Parker, 137.

27 Parker, 137.
a Júpiter mejor que el garzón de Ida
-naufrago y desdénado, sobre ausente-,
lagrimosas de amor dulces querellas
da al mar;...

Del Oceáno, pues, antes sorvido,
y luego vomitado
no lejos de un escollo coronado
de secos juncos, de calientes plumas
-alga todo y espumas-
halló hospitalidad donde halló nido
de Júpiter el ave (404-05).

For Jupiter, the lovesick boy gave tears
(Absent, disdained and shipwrecked) to the tide
And winds, which moved by his complaining lays
As to a new Arion's harp gave heed.

Engulfed before, then spewed up by the sea,
(Covered with foam, with seaweed girded) found
A hospitable rest,
Where built the bird of Jupiter nest.\textsuperscript{28}

In his study of Góngora’s \textit{cultismo}, Dámaso Alonso, Castellanos’ graduate advisor in Spain (\textit{Meditación} 17), explains that in Góngora’s poetry there appears a streak of humour and skepticism that satirizes the corruption of customs (Alonso 32). As an ironist, Castellanos knew how to use language as a social and political tool the same way \textit{cultismo} with its criticism of corrupted customs did. It is important to note also two characteristics found in Góngora which are represented clearly in “Lamentación”: first, that it imitates the Greco-Latin poets of antiquity (Alonso 70), and, second, that, as in Góngora, this style is exemplified in the form of “long poems” (Alonso 71). Therefore, Alonso explains about \textit{cultismo} and Góngora’s unique use of it that:

\[\ldots\text{es, en principio, toda voz que no se ha desarrollado de acuerdo con las normas fonéticas, porque la cultura ha actuado como frenadora de la evolución o como importadora de la palabra.}\]

\[\ldots\text{it is, in principle, a voice that has not developed in accordance to the phonetic norms, because culture has functioned as a restraint of its evolution or as an introduction to the world. (Alonso 126)}\]

\[\ldots\text{el cultismo podríamos decir que es el modo de esquivar la palabra desgastada en el comercio idiomático y sustituirla por otra que abre también una ventana sobre un mundo de fantástica coloración: el mundo de la tradición grecolatina.}\]

\[\ldots\text{one could say that \textit{cultismo} is a way of avoiding the worn word in the language negotiations and substituting it by another one which}\]

\textsuperscript{28} Translated by Edward Meryon Wilson in \textit{Solitudes by Luis de Góngora y Argote}, 7.
opens a window on a world of fantastic coloration: the world of the Greco-Latin tradition. (Alonso 130)

For Alonso, Góngora’s use of a highly cultivated discourse came as a product of the heavy weight imposed by traditions; to follow such tradition demanded already high standards from the poetic language of that time (Alonso 129). This is important with regard to Castellanos because her condemnation of socially and culturally pre-established norms of gender-related conduct is directly linked to her analysis of language (oral and written) and literature.

Both Góngora and, in turn, Castellanos use this style to express their own social beliefs. On one hand Góngora believes that language needs revitalization, thus, by using Latin syntax, he sets with his poetry a new level of acculturated discourse. Similarly Castellanos, by acquiring Góngora’s admiration for the Greco-Latin tradition tries to also set new standards for the discourse of her time. In her case, however, is not as much the transformation of language itself, but the reordering of social and gender hierarchies from the traditional order to an entirely new perspective. Castellanos does not introduce Aeneas as the primary character; rather she gives center stage to Dido, and in that way reverses the social views between the public-male and the private-female worlds.

Following Góngora’s literary footsteps, Castellanos makes of Dido’s ancient story a long poem which both retraces Mexico’s Hispanic heritage and the Greco-Latin traditions of the Hispanic world. Castellanos reverses the relevance of Dido’s legend by granting her a voice and by honouring her attributes as an active participant of her own destiny. Castellanos allows this female character of antiquity to regain her role as primary
protagonist. Castellanos achieves this by reversing the order of appearance of both Aeneas and Dido in her poem.

There are many similarities between “Lamentación” and Góngora’s *Soledades*\(^{29}\) and *El Polifemo*; however, and as Castellanos does from the beginning of the poem, these

\(^{29}\) We can find a reference to queen Dido in *La Soledad Segunda*:

\begin{verbatim}
Cóncavo fresno, a quien gracioso indulto
de su caduco natural permite
que a la encina vivaz robusto imite,
y hueco exceda al alcornoque inculto,
verde era pompa de un vallete oculto,
cuando frondoso alcázar no de aquél
que sin corona vuela y sin espada,
susurrante Amazona, Dido alada,
de ejército más casto, de más bella
gerencia, ceñida en vez de muros
de cortezas: en esta pues Cartago
reina la abeja, oro brillando vago,
o el aire beba de los aires puros,
o el sudor de los ciclos, cuando liba
de las mudas estrellas la saliva (463);
\end{verbatim}

A concave ash, that gracious amnesty

From natural frailty thereby had allowed
are only tools that enable her to achieve her true goal. Castellanos uses her literary heritage in order to move away from it. This becomes more evident as Castellanos introduces Aeneas as the secondary character by placing Dido in center stage:

-La mujer es la que pertenece; rama de sauce que
llora en las orillas de los rios.

-It is Woman who belongs; a willow’s crying branch

To rival strength and age of ilex proud
And of the hollow cork-oak, was the green
And leafy glory of hidden vale:
If not the flowery castle for a queen
Who, without sword or crown,
A rustling Amazon, winged Dido, flies,
Thought of a chaster army, a more fair
Republic, girded by no city’s pale
But cork-bark; in Carthage, then, behold
The bee as queen who shines with wandering gold;
Either the sap she drinks from the pure air,
Or else the exudation from the skies
That sip the spittle from each silent star (Translated Wilson 7);
by the riverbank. ("Lamentación", 123)

As in the beginning of the poem where Dido feels trapped inside the bark of "the tree of traditions", Aeneas is the wind that moves her. Castellanos becomes the foreign voice that allows Dido to talk. In the following stanza Dido expresses her love for Aeneas as part of an entrapment inside the roots of tradition that she labels as blind, slow fidelity:

Y yo amé a aquel Eneas, aquel hombre de promesa
jurada ante otros dioses.

Lo amé con mi ceguera de raíz, con mi soterramiento
de raíz, con mi lenta fidelidad de raíz.

No, no era la juventud. Era su mirada lo que así me
cubría de florecimientos repentinos. Entonces yo fui capaz
de poner la palma de mi mano, en signo de amistades, amistades, las especies hostiles. Y vi también
reducirse a número los astros. Y oí que el mundo
tocaba su flauta de pastor.

And I loved that Aeneas, that man that swore his promise
before alien gods.

I loved him with rooted blindness, with rooted depth,
with my slow-rooted faithfulness.

No, it was not youth. It was his gaze that
covered me with sudden flowerings. Thus I was
to place the palm of my hand, as a sign of alliance, on
the earth’s forehead. And I also saw coming towards me
hostile species made friendly. And I saw also reduced
to numbers the stars. And I heard the world playing its
pastoral flute. ("Lamentación", 123-24)

Castellanos does not deny the passion between the two lovers.30 Like a pastoral
novel, the original encounter between the two lovers is innocent and well-intentioned,
naïve to the point that even the "hostile species" seems friendly. In other words,
Castellanos begins with the platonic idea of love, induced by the lover’s gaze. Dido,
moreover, admits her failure for falling in love with a wanderer, and just as Virgil’s Dido,
she craves revenge:

    Pero esto no era suficiente. Y yo cubrí mi rostro con
    la máscara nocturna del amante.
    Ah, los que aman apuran tóxicos mortales. Y el
    veneno enardeciendo su sangre, nublando sus ojos,
    trastornando su juicio, los conduce a cometer actos

30 The same way that throughout her life Castellanos acknowledged her love for Ricardo
Guerra, although she was fully aware of their emotional differences. See Cartas a
Ricardo.
desatentados; a menospreciar aquello que tuvieron en
más estima; a hacer escarnio de su túnica y a
arrojar su fama como pasto para que hocen los cerdos.
Así, aconsejada de mis enemigos, di pábulo al deseo
y maquiné satisfacciones ilícitas y teji un espeso
manto de hipocresía para cubrirlas.
Pero nada permanece oculto a la venganza. La
tempestad presidió nuestro ayuntamiento; la reprobación
fue el eco de nuestras decisiones.

But this was not enough. And I covered my face with
the lover's nocturnal mask.
Oh, the ones who love swallow mortal poison. And the venom
that inflames their blood, clouds their eyes, disturbs their
judgment, leads them to commit foolish acts; to underestimate
that which they help in highest esteem, to
ridicule their tunic and to throw away their reputation
like grass for the pigs to root in.

This is how, ill-advised by my enemies, I encouraged
lust and plotted illicit pleasures and wore a thick
cloak of hypocrisies to conceal them.
Yet, nothing can hide from vengeance. The storm presided our union; condemnation was the echo of our decisions. ("Lamentación", 124)

During the time she writes "Lamentación", Castellanos knows that female self-expression is almost non-existent in a male elitist literary world. She also knows that women, in general, have been kept in the obscure corners of the private sphere for centuries. By establishing a new hierarchy in "Lamentación", Castellanos brings women out from the darkness into the light. It is true that in the poem, Dido still falls madly in love with Aeneas. Still, this love affair is portrayed as a public display of human passions. By doing so, Castellanos has exchanged the public and the private. For Castellanos, the private Dido is the one who engages in practices and holds ideas meant to be in the non-domestic arena. For example she takes part in the "elders" assembly, while falling in love takes place in an open setting similar to an open court. Yet Dido becomes a prisoner of her own failure:

Mirad, aquí y allá, esparcidos, los instrumentos de la labor.

Mirad el ceño del deber defraudado. Porque la molicie nos había reblandecido los tuétanos.

Y convertida en antorcha yo no supe iluminar más que el desastre.

Pero el hombre está sujeto durante un plazo menor a la embriaguez.
Lúcido nuevamente, apenas salpicando por la sangre
de la víctima,
Eneas partió.

Nada detiene al viento. ¡Cómo iba a detenerlo la
rama de sauce que llora en las orillas de los ríos!

Look, here and there, lie scattered the tools that did it.
Look at the scowl of defrauded duty, because sloth
had softened our temper.
And I, transformed into a torch only knew how to
light the way of disaster.

But man is subject to drunken rapture for a lesser
period of time.

Lucid again, barely splattered with the victim’s
blood,
Aeneas left.

Nothing stops the wind. How could the willow’s branch
by the riverbank stop him! (“Lamentación”, 124-25)
By admitting to her own failure, Dido is portrayed as a person responsible for her own doing, and not merely the object of destiny. Dido becomes as much a subject of her actions as Aeneas. As Castellanos did at the beginning of “Lamentación”, where she balances the power relations between the “male-wind” and the “female-spirit”; in these lines, again, she transforms Aeneas into the elusive wind to which the powerless static willow cannot influence.

Castellanos, mirroring Aeneas’ and Dido’s symbolism in “Lamentación”, reverses both their strengths and weaknesses. While in the first half Aeneas is portrayed as the “wind without history” (“el viento sin historia”) unable to move “the bark from the great tree of traditions” (“la corteza del árbol enorme de las tradiciones”) in contrast, in this last line, it is the feminine “willow’s branch by the riverbank” (“la rama de sauce que llora en las orillas de los rios”) that cannot stop the wind’s course. Just as in the ancient poem where Aeneas is the unstoppable hero determined to undertake his historical quest, the founding of Rome; in “Lamentación”, Castellanos goes back to the Roman tale and grants Aeneas his power back.

It is true that Dido agonizes over Aeneas’ abandonment; it is also true that Castellanos depicts a shameful Dido, for Castellanos does not stray far from the ancient tale. However, Castellanos chooses eternal suffering over suicide for Dido. By changing Dido’s fate, Castellanos is contending against the misogynist notion of the “hysterical” woman (from the Greek, *histeria*: womb) or “lunatic” woman (from the idea of the lunar cycles as influence on dementia). Indeed, as the last verses show, Dido falls prey to dementia, yet, within herself she still possesses the wisdom not to kill herself. So,
Castellanos finishes “Lamentación” with a passionate recognition of a woman’s eternal suffering:

En vano, en vano fue correr, destrenzada y frenética,
sobre las arenas humeantes de la playa.

Rasgué mi corazón y echó a volar una bandada de
palomas negras. Y hasta el anochecer permanecí,
inclóreme como un acantilado, bajo el brutal abalanzamiento
de las olas.

He aquí que al volver ya no me reconozco. Llego a
mi casa y la encuentro arrasada por las furias. Ando
por los caminos sin más vestidura para cubrirme
que el velo arrebatado a la vergüenza; sin otro
cíngulo que el de la desesperación para apretar mis
sienes. Y, monótona zumbadora, la demencia me
persigue con su aguijón de tábano.

Mis amigos me miran al través de sus lágrimas; mis
deudos vuelven el rostro hacia otra parte. Porque
la desgracia es espectáculo que algunos no deben
contemplar.
Ah, sería preferible morir. Pero yo sé que para mí no hay muerte.
Porque el dolor- ¿Y qué otra cosa soy más que dolor?
-me ha hecho eterna.

In vain, in vain did I run disheveled and frantic,
on steaming sand of the beach.

I tore open my heart and a flock of black doves flew out.
And until dusk I stayed but, like a rock, beaming the waves’ brutal attack.

I find upon my return I cannot recognize myself.
I arrive home and I find it razed to the ground by the furies.
I travel the roads with no cloth to cover me other than the veil of shame; with no sash other than that of desperation to bind my temples. And humming drearily, madness hounds me with her horsefly’s sting.
My friends look at me through their tears; my relatives turn their face away. Because misfortune is a spectacle that some should not witness.

Oh, it would be better to die. But I know that for me
there is no death.
Because grief and -what else am I but grief?

-it has made me eternal. ("Lamentación", 125)

Dido, who has survived centuries of historical scrutiny, became Castellanos’ first archetype of womanhood. Castellanos admires Dido to the point of transforming her into her own illustration of the many faces of woman. In "Lamentación" Dido is regal, learned, judicial, unyielding and resilient; she is also, domestic and political, public and private, passionate, suffering, and demented. While Virgil’s Dido ends her life in a sudden passionate and vengeful impulse, Castellanos turns the end of Dido’s life into a transgression of the female experience.

As a matter of fact, Castellanos related to grief and affliction. It is no surprise that she chose for Dido an end of eternal sorrow. Castellanos on many occasions testified to her sufferings caused by years of isolation. In 1973, in an article sent to Excélsior, she summarized the solitude she endured for most of her life, imposed upon her by accidental life’s events: her brother’s premature death, home-schooling, being victim of tuberculosis and marrying “late”, to mention a few (Meditación 18-9).

Perhaps one key verse in “Lamentación” encapsulates Castellanos’ sense of detachment and isolation: “He aquí que al volver ya no me reconozco” (“I find upon my return I cannot recognize myself”). With these words, Castellanos declares the person she has become, and therefore, what she has wanted Dido to become as well. Castellanos has turned the ancient Dido into a new character by granting her her own voice and destiny. Equally Castellanos, in her personal quest for knowledge and understanding of her own identity, had become unrecognizable. Indeed, it was through her readings of philosophy
and literature before and during her studies in Spain in 1951 that Castellanos acquired an enriched and bolder view of the many preoccupations that troubled her young curious mind. Thus, she did return with an “unrecognizable” aspiration for understanding the Mexican question: not only “what it was to be Mexican” as Octavio Paz inquired in his *Laberinth of Solitude*, but mostly, for Castellanos “what it was to be a Mexican woman.” Moreover, Castellanos identification with foreign philosophies allowed her to find answers to her own personal agonies. One example of such deep inquiry comes through the writings of Simone Weil, from whom Castellanos quoted on the matter of affliction in her article “Simone Weil: La que pertenece en los umbrales” (*Simone Weil: The One Who Belongs in the Thresholds)*:

> La desgracia endurece y desespera porque imprime, hasta el fondo del alma, como hierro al rojo, el desprecio, el disgusto y la repulsión de sí mismo, esa sensación de culpabilidad y de mancha que en el crimen debiera lógicamente producir y no produce. El mal mora el alma del criminal sin ser sentido. Es sentido en el alma del inocente desgraciado.

> Todo el desprecio, todo el odio, toda la repulsión que nuestra razón asocia al crimen, nuestra sensibilidad lo confiere a la desgracia […] Por eso la compasión para los desgraciados es una imposibilidad. Cuando realmente se produce es un milagro más sorprendente que la marcha sobre las aguas, la curación de los enfermos y aun la resurrección de un muerto.

*(*Mujer 60)*
Affliction-hardens and discourages because, like a red-hot iron, it stamps the soul to its very depths with the contempt, the disgust, and even the self-hatred and sense of guilt and defilement which crime logically should produce but actually does not. Evil dwells in the heart of the criminal without being felt there. It is felt in the heart of the man who is afflicted and innocent. Everything happens as though the state of soul appropriate for criminals had been separated from crime and attached to affliction; and it even seems to be in proportion to the innocence of those who are afflicted.\textsuperscript{31}

For Weil, affliction marks one's soul like a red-hot iron and those men and women victims of oppression suffer insurmountable transformations to their spirit. The real miracle, as Castellanos describes such affliction, is to be able to notice, after all that suffering, to become aware not only of the suffering of oneself but the suffering of others.

As Octavio Paz stated in the “Preface” to \textit{Children of the Mire}:

A poem is an object fashioned out of the language, rhythms, beliefs, and obsessions of a poet and a society. It is the product of a definite history and a definite society, but its historical mode of existence is contradictory (V).

With “Lamentación” Castellanos gave Mexico a challenging overview of itself. She outlines centuries of cultural background, while at the same time dissects Mexican

gender relations. At this point in her writing (1953-1955) she does not present answers to her observations; that comes later in numerous poems, narratives, and non-fictional works. “Lamentación”, however, was only the beginning in Castellanos’ quest to uncover and liberate women from the sequestered lives that were forced into. As Woolf testifies wisely in *Three Guineas*, women represent “the lives of the obscure” (309). Furthermore, Castellanos poignantly points out that Margaret Cavendish says: “Las mujeres viven como murciélagos, trabajan como bestias y mueren como gusanos” (“Women live like bats, work like beasts and die like worms”) (*Mujer* 78). By courageously reflecting and openly expressing the unbalanced realities of women’s lives, Castellanos became one of the leading forces in the feminist transformation of Mexican society.
Conclusion.

Today, critics perceive Rosario Castellanos’ “Lamentación de Dido” as a strong feminist poem. Back in 1953, readers viewed it mostly as the personal testimony of a woman writer. However, for Castellanos, “Lamentación” was a testimony beyond the personal: it was the feminist vision of one woman—mestiza, middle-class and educated—for women’s freedom, mostly the uneducated peasant women who, like Castellanos, were oppressed in their private world, but unlike the writer, lacked a public voice.

In order to decipher how Castellanos set upon to achieve this goal, it is necessary to search her writing, in poems such as “Lamentación”, for the roots of her feminist quest. As it is shown in this analysis of Castellanos’ unapologetic retelling of classical Dido’s story, Castellanos had to go beyond what she perceived as the limitations of her own culture. 1950’s Mexico might have been limiting to women, but not intellectually limiting to the literary elite. It is exactly because of that time period’s taste for erudition that privileged women like Castellanos were able to explore foreign theories of social equality and to search for a new feminist discourse to express the voices of the oppressed.

Castellanos, following the ideas of three exceptional non-Mexican female thinkers (Beauvoir, Woolf and Weil), contested not only the exclusion she felt in male-dominated literary circles but also the exclusion of all Mexican women from public recognition. The result is “Lamentación de Dido”, a culturally rich poem where Castellanos expresses her resentment towards the lack of a public voice for Mexican women. Castellanos understood that Mexican women had been oppressed for centuries under the yoke of domesticity.
Rosario Castellanos lived at a time when in Mexico women were valued mostly because of their domesticity: domesticity of body and soul. For centuries, women’s bodies had been trained for servitude, through manual labour, and for endurance for every day’s hardship. Their bodies were appreciated only for their reproductive and non-remunerated productive services such as maternity, crafts, care for family and friends, and continuity of social matriarchal bonds.

As if that were not enough, the domesticity of a woman’s soul was even more precious. From the times of the Aztec Empire, through colonial, independent and revolutionary Mexico, a woman’s soul was not allowed to rebel as its male counterparts was. Women’s tamed souls were not permitted to aim for their own goals, to aspire to objectives separate from those of the family-clan, to fight for their own rights, to produce their own earnings, to manage their own children’s lives, or their own destinies.

It is because of the realization of the power of such domesticity that literary women like Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Rosario Castellanos wrote about the lives of women, about women’s feelings of oppression and their quest for self-expression beyond the walls of house and convent.

By making domesticity the theme of public debate through her poetry, Castellanos challenged the idiosyncrasies that for centuries had imprisoned women’s bodies and souls. She took advantage of post-war European and North American feminist philosophies to create her own feminist forum. Although mostly accessible to middle-class, mestiza, educated women- this forum allowed for questioning of the social status of all Mexican women.
Through her poetry, as well as her narrative and dramatic works, Castellanos exposed racial and gender inequalities, inequalities that post-revolutionary Mexico pretended to eradicate. With her most famous writings, especially those written between 1953 and 1962, Balún Canán, Oficio de Tinieblas, “Lamentación de Dido”, “Judith” and “Salomé,” Castellanos merged the many spheres of Mexican women’s lives during this time. She intertwined the realities of women and Indigenous people’s lives as well as her own views on how these underprivileged social groups could begin to find a voice within the political and social structures of modern Mexico.

In “Lamentación” Castellanos raised her voice against oppression, while lamenting what women perceived as their fate, a fate mostly based on their lack of education and opportunities. As Castellanos admits in her lament, women do read, but hidden in domestic obscurity. She challenges women who read-- the well-educated women who read poetry-- to speak out publicly. Castellanos hopes that these voices will assist the process through which the underprivileged women of Mexico can find equality.
Bibliography.


<http: www.utm.edu/research/lep/d/diogsino.htm>


Gómez-Parham, Mary. "Rosario Castellanos and the New Essays: Writing It Like a Woman." *The Text and Beyond: Essays in Literature Linguistics* 25. Tuscaloosa:


López Gonzalez, Aralia. “Dos tendencias en la evolución de la narrativa contemporánea


Apendix.

“Dido’s Lament”: An English Translation.

At the time of the writing of this study, there was no available English translation of “Lamentación de Dido”. I undertook its translation in order to make Castellanos’ poem available to researchers and members of the general public who do not speak Spanish.

Guardian of tombs; my brother’s loot,
he of the sparrowhawk’s curved claw;
ship of elegant sails, graceful ship, sacrificed to
the storm’s lighting;
woman who sets foot for the first time
on desolated soil
and later is the nurturer of nations, nurturer that
nurses with the milk of wisdom and advice;
woman always, and until the end, who with the same step
of sacred peregrination
climbs-dragging the dark wealth of her memory-
towards the high pyre of suicide.
This is the tale of my deeds. Dido is my name. Destinies
like mine have risen up since antiquity
with beautiful and noble words.
My cipher was engraved in the bark of the vast tree
of traditions.
And each spring, when the tree leafs
it's my spirit, not the wind without history, it's my spirit
that trembles and that makes its foliage sing.
And to be reborn, year after year,
I choose among the vehement callings that crown me, so that
they will shine with a unique glow,
this one, which gives me some link with the seashore:
Dido, the abandoned, the one who placed her heart under
the hacking-blow of a dreadful farewell.
I used to be what I was: a woman of investiture disproportionate
to the frailty of her heart.
And, sitting by the shadow of my undeserved throne,
I trembled under the royal purple like the water trembles
beneath the mire.
And to obey orders which are beyond my comprehension
I scoured the flagstones of the porticos
with the scales of justice in my hands
and I weighed deeds and I consented openly to
some-of the most grievous ones.
This was during the day. During the night, not
the glass of feast, the joy of the serenade, the delightful sleep.
Instead my eyes pried the darkness, my intelligence beat the impenetrable
forest of the text in order to capture the prey that
escapes between the pages.

And my ears, accustomed to the mentors' harsh debates
became skillful at distinguishing the robust sound of gold
from the barren noise which pebbles make when they collide.

From my mother, who did not disdain my hands but anointed
them from the beginning with the gift of dexterity
I inherited various arts: wool-carder, picker
of the best fruit for the season and the climate,
keeper of the lamps.

That is how I took control of my days:
colts tamed into knowing the road and recognizing the longing.

That is how I took my place in the elders' assembly.

And at the moment of the sharing I ate placidly
the bread that my relatives had kneaded.

And frequently I felt melting in my mouth
the grain of salt of a joyful event.

But I did not squander my loyalty. I treasured it
for the time of laments,
for the time when the crows flutter their wings above the tiled roofs
and stain the transparent sky with their lugubrious cawing
for the time when misfortune enters through
the mansion's front door
and is welcomed like a queen.
This is how my youth elapsed: performing trifling
domestic chores
and daily rites; attending
solemn civic events.
And I so would sleep, leaning my head over a pillow of trust.
That is how the plain as it stretches on can believe in
the benevolence of its fate
because it ignores that its own expanse is no more than
a track where the flame of a blaze runs like a victorious
athlete with his face a glow with heroic effort.
And the blaze reached me, predator, ruin, exterminator
I have not said love!, in the shape of a castaway.
This thing that the sea rejects, I said, is mine.
And before him I donned compassion like
the most precious bracelet.
I entreat you, if you hear me, to respond: whoever
succeeded in avoiding
adversity? And who would find it a disgrace
to be called her guest and to have the feasting-hall
prepared for him?
Whosoever would is not my equal. My discourse is
related to the discourse of the immolators of themselves.
The knife under which my neck was shattered was a man called Aeneas.

That Aeneas, that one, merciful only to his own.

sheltered by the fortress of foreign walls; cunning, with all the guiles of a hunted beast;
he who invokes favourable goals; elegant teller of misfortunes and transient; a man with his heart set in the future.

-It is Woman who belongs; a willow’s crying branch by the riverbank.

And I loved that Aeneas, that man that swore his promise before alien gods.

I loved him with rooted blindness, with rooted depth, with my slow-rooted faithfulness.

No, it was not youth. It was his gaze that covered me with sudden flowerings. Thus I was to place the palm of my hand, as a sign of alliance, on the earth’s forehead. And I also saw coming towards me hostile species made friendly. And I saw also reduced to numbers the stars. And I heard the world playing its pastoral flute.

But this was not enough. And I covered my face with
the lover's nocturnal mask.

Oh, the ones who love swallow mortal poison. And the venom that inflames their blood, clouds their eyes, disturbs their judgment, leads them to commit foolish acts; to underestimate that which they help in highest esteem, to ridicule their tunic and to throw away their reputation like grass for the pigs to root in.

This is how, ill-advised by my enemies, I encouraged lust and plotted illicit pleasures and wore a thick cloak of hypocrisies to conceal them.

Yet, nothing can hide from vengeance. The storm presided our union; condemnation was the echo of our decisions.

Look, here and there, lie scattered the tools that did it.

Look at the scowl of defrauded duty, because sloth had softened our temper.

And I, transformed into a torch only knew how to light the way of disaster.

But man is subject to drunken rapture for a lesser period of time.

Lucid again, barely spattered with the victim's blood,

Aeneas left.
Nothing stops the wind. How could the willow’s branch
by the riverbank stop him! (“Lamentación”, 124-25)
In vain, in vain did I run disheveled and frantic,
on steaming sand of the beach.
I tore open my heart and a flock of black doves flew out.
And until dusk I stayed but, like a rock, beaming the waves’
brutal attack.
I find upon my return I cannot recognize myself.
I arrive home and I find it razed to the ground by the
furies.
I travel the roads with no cloth to cover me other than
the veil of shame; with no sash other than
that of desperation to bind my temples. And humming
dreamily, madness hounds me with her
horsefly’s sting.
My friends look at me through their tears; my relatives turn their
face away. Because misfortune is a spectacle
that some should not witness.
Oh, it would be better to die. But I know that for me
there is no death.
Because grief and -what else am I but grief?
-it has made me eternal.