

**NEGOTIATING THE FEMININE: TRAVEL, WRITING AND IDENTITY IN ROSARIO
CASTELLANOS'S NONFICTION FROM SPAIN, THE UNITED STATES AND ISRAEL**

by

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Abstract

The Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974) is well known for *Balún Canán* (1957) and other works of prose, poetry, or drama. However, in my thesis I aim to shed light on a genre that has been understudied by scholars and neglected by translators: her nonfiction. Of her nonfiction, I look specifically at her travel writing. Firstly, at the letters she addressed to Ricardo Guerra (1927-2007), compiled in *Cartas a Ricardo* (1994) [*Letters to Ricardo*]. And, lastly, at the articles she wrote as Mexican ambassador to Israel (1971-1974) which were originally published in *Excélsior* but, have since been anthologized and edited by Andrea Reyes in *Mujer de palabras: artículos rescatados de Rosario Castellanos*, volume III (2007).

More specifically, Castellanos, after being awarded a scholarship by the Institute of Hispanic Culture (1950-1951), wrote letters from aboard the S.S. Argentina, and from the women's residence in Madrid. I look at Castellanos and her companion, Dolores Castro (1923-2022), as women traveling unaccompanied by men in Franco's Spain. I also analyze Castellanos's reaction to the Moorish, Jewish and Catholic cultures in Spain in relation to her own complex legacy as a member of the dominant land-owning class in Mexico. Some twenty-five years later in Castellanos's letters which she wrote as a visiting professor in the U.S., (1966-1967), I focus on her identity as a cosmopolitan woman whose letters constitute a form of resistance to gender roles in Mexican society. I argue that she uses the epistolary genre to create her own self and that during her stay in the U.S., along with her son and her son's nanny, Herlinda Bolaños, she reconfigures her own identity and, consequently, her identity from both inside and beyond the confines of the family.

Castellanos's letters, and to some extent her journalism, with the myriad details of daily life, function as a combination of travel diary, autobiographical memoir, and epistolary novel

where she can create herself as a literary character. My objective is to avoid a strictly autobiographical reading of this work and so be able to place Castellanos's travel writing firmly in contemporary literature.

Lay Summary

Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974) is one of the most influential Mexican writers of the twentieth century. Of all the genres in which she wrote, her nonfiction writing has been the most neglected by critics and translators. In my thesis, I look at her travel writing: her letters to her husband Ricardo Guerra (1927 – 2007) when she was on a postdoctoral fellowship in Spain (1950 – 1951); the letters from the academic year (1966 – 1967) when she taught at three universities in the American Midwest; lastly, her journalism from Israel, which she wrote as the Mexican ambassador (1971 – 1974) and was published in the leading Mexico City newspaper, *Excélsior*. I argue that in her letters and journalism – both traditionally considered minor genres – with the use of the first person, Castellanos creates herself as a literary character. Ultimately, I aim to place Castellanos fully in the twentieth century as a transnational woman writer.

Preface

This thesis is the original, unpublished, independent work by the author Nancy Jean Ross.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Objective and Research Questions

Historically, for a woman to travel is to leave the domestic sphere, to escape or postpone conventional domestic duties, the four walls of the house and enter into a distinct space. Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974) was a woman who traveled. Castellanos's letters and journalism, through which she negotiated her identity—from a 25-year-old postdoctoral student in Madrid to a visiting university professor in the U.S. Midwest in the 1960's to Mexican ambassador to Israel in the early 1970's—are marked by travel. Through a close reading of Castellanos's letters from Spain and from the U.S. in *Cartas a Ricardo* (1994) and her journalism from Israel collected in *Mujer de palabras: Artículos rescatados de Rosario Castellanos* volume III (2007) edited by Andrea H. Reyes, I address the following questions: How does Castellanos, through her travel writing, fit into Mexican national identity and how does she not fit? Where are the boundaries between her identity as a Mexican woman and as a transnational writer? And how does Castellanos negotiate herself in the distinct regions in which she travels?

1.2 The Place of Castellanos in Travel Writing

This study is relevant because Castellanos's nonfiction corpus has been the most neglected of all her work by literary critics and translators. Although there is work on Latin American women writer travellers from the nineteenth century—such as Vanessa Miseres's *Mujeres en tránsito* and Sylvia Molloy's *La viajera y sus sombras: crónica de un aprendizaje*—there is relatively little written about Mexican women writers who travelled in the mid-twentieth century. *Mujeres en tránsito* focuses on the travel writing of four nineteenth-century women, all of whom travelled in Latin America and Europe: Flora Tristán, Eduarda Mansilla, Clorindo de Matto and Juana

Manuela Gorriti. *La viajera y sus sombras* is an edited collection of the travel writing of Victoria Ocampo (1890 – 1979), a writer whose work, like Castellanos's, was greatly influenced by travel.

Castellanos could be considered a representative of the mid-twentieth century, a period of transition in Mexico, as in all Latin America, when the country changed from being a predominantly rural society to an urban one. Indeed, in the decade between 1950 and 1960, unprecedented numbers of people migrated internally in Mexico from rural areas to urban ones (Stevens 86). During her teenage years, Castellanos and her family formed part of this internal migration, moving from the southernmost city in Mexico, Comitán in the state of Chiapas, where Castellanos's family owned lands, to the capital.

In Mexico, travel writing has a shaky standing. Pitman in "Mexican Travel Writing: The Legacy of Foreign Travel Writers in Mexico, or Why Mexicans Say They Don't Write Travel Books" addresses the ambiguities around travel writing in Mexico by quoting José Emilio Pacheco: "El libro de viajes es sobre todo un género del Norte: la mirada sobre las tierras conquistadas o por conquistar" (Pacheco 13). And in *Contemporary Travel Writing of Latin America*, Claire Lindsay speaks of the paucity of criticism of twentieth-century Latin American travel writing (5). My study of Castellanos's letters and journalism addresses this paucity by reading Castellanos's letters and journalism as a form of travel writing. I examine the letters in *Cartas a Ricardo*, which date from 1950 to 1967 and her journalism from Israel in *Mujer de palabras: artículos rescatados de Rosario Castellanos* volume III, which covers 1971 to 1974, the year of her death in Israel, showing how these works should be read under the rubric of travel writing.

When Pacheco calls travel writing a colonialist project, he is addressing the history of travel writing in Latin America that has been dominated by European writers, notably Alexander von Humboldt, whose work was widely published in Mexico, writing with what Mary Louise Pratt calls “imperial eyes.” To add to the complications of travel writing in Latin America, Jean Franco speaks of the historical role of the artist in Latin America as being primarily one that has been characterised by “an intense social concern” (1) and subsequently at odds with travel writing, which, like autobiography, maintains an “I.”

It is important to note that Castellanos’s letters offer multiple readings. They can be read as dispatches and also as love letters. Women’s letters have very often been associated with the love letter despite the many alternate readings they potentially offered. In fact, until recently, women’s love letters were considered to be transparent (Verhoeven Gilroy 3). The history of the reception of Castellanos’s letters is no exception.¹ By categorizing Castellanos’s letters as travel writing, I intend to offer an alternative reading. I explore how Castellanos, by directing that her letters be published posthumously, makes possible the transformation of the letters from a personal document to a public one and her own identity from a woman who wrote love letters to that of a published writer.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

As a starting point, I use a theoretical framework predominantly based on genre (travel writing, epistolary theory, etc.). To do this, I look at *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* and

¹ In the prologue to *Cartas a Ricardo* by Elena Poniatowska, Poniatowska frames Castellanos’s letters as love letters.

the Routledge Research in Travel Writing Series, both edited by Tim Youngs and Peter Hulme; Claire Lindsay's *Contemporary Travel Writing of Latin America: Women, Travel Writing and Truth* edited by Clare Broome Saunders. I also look at Sara Mills's *Discourse of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*. One of Mills's arguments is that reactions to travel writing by women have traditionally taken the women out of the historical colonial time in which they lived and travelled, rendering them exceptional ahistorical beings. I take a similar historicist approach as Mills by locating Castellanos firmly in the time in which she wrote in order to reflect on how Castellanos negotiated her role within the expectations for women travelers. I consider scholarship on nineteenth-century Latin American women travel writers like Flora Tristán, Eduarda Mansilla, and Clorinda Matto de Turner. For example, Matto de Turner, like Castellanos, made "el recorrido inverso," that is to say she travelled to Spain and France from Peru. And Matto de Turner, also like Castellanos, before she travelled to Europe had moved within her country from the fringes to the metropolitan center. In this vein, Castellanos's writerly contemporaries from the twentieth century also include Gabriela Mistral and Victoria Ocampo—two Latin American writers who travelled and published extensively and who also wrote letters (and, in Mistral's case, like Castellanos's, held diplomatic posts).

I consult epistolary theory, for example, the anthology *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction and Culture* edited by Amanda Gilroy and W. M. Verhoeven. In this collection, "the contributors show how the letter puts pressure on the distinction between public and private" and "[they] rethink the boundaries of the epistolary" (21). I use Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance and her argument that "An identity is instituted through a stylish repetition of acts" (520). In regard to theory on journalism, I consult Ignacio Corona's and Beth E. Jorgensen's *The Contemporary Mexican Chronicle. Theoretical Perspectives on the Liminal Genre*. Castellanos's

journalism shares many characteristics with what is called chronicle in Mexico. I posit that her journalism and letters have themes in common.

1.4 Literature Review

The main sources for this work include Castellanos's *Cartas a Ricardo* (1994) and *Mujer de palabras: artículos rescatados de Rosario Castellanos* volume III (2007). Notwithstanding their literary value, Castellanos's letters and journalism have traditionally been excluded from the canon. For example, two volumes of her collected work *Obras I y Obras II* edited by Eduardo Mejía and published by Fondo de Cultura Económica in 1989 and 1998 respectively (both these works have been reprinted several times) omit all of Castellanos's correspondences. As a result, there has been comparatively little written about *Cartas a Ricardo* and Castellanos's journalism. (A possible reason that Castellanos's letters and journalism are understudied is because they are not easily accessible in Spanish, neither have they been widely translated into English.) Among the few exceptions, Erin Louise Gallo (2018) wrote her PhD dissertation on Castellanos's nonfiction writing where she places Castellanos's writing in the context of the global feminist movement. In addition, Maureen Ahearn (1988) edited and anthologized a collection of Castellanos's works translated into English which includes poetry, short stories, essays and theatre. Moreover, Andrea Reyes (2004 – 2007) collected and published in three volumes all of Castellanos's journalism. Lastly, Parra Lozcano (2018) has written on Castellanos's journalism in Israel, examining how Castellanos negotiates a place in-between or outside the lines in terms of national identity and social norms, which corresponds to the Nahuatl word "nepantla" translated as "tierra en medio."

Conversely, Castellanos's first novel, *Balún Canán* (1957), is considered a canonical work. It was reissued in 2004 by Cátedra with extensive notes by Dora Sales. Two full-length books on Castellanos's work are Joanna O'Connell's, *Prospero's Daughter: The Prose of Rosario Castellanos* (1995) and *A Rosario Castellanos Reader: An Anthology of Her Poetry, Short Fiction, Essays and Drama* (1988) edited and translated by Maureen Ahern. O'Connell's work focuses on Castellanos's thesis, *Sobre cultura femenina* (2005);² *Balún Canán*; her second novel, *Oficio de tinieblas* (1962); the short story collections *Ciudad Real* (1960), *Convidados de agosto* (1964), and *Álbum de familia* (1971); and essays from Castellanos's four published essay collections. Although several articles that Castellanos wrote from Israel were republished in the posthumous essay collection, *El uso de la palabra*, the majority were not republished in Spanish until Reyes's edited collection. An example of an essay Castellanos wrote from Israel is "Recado a Gabriel: donde se encuentre" (*Excelsior*, August 26, 1974). This article, in the form of a letter to Castellanos's son Gabriel, was found among Castellanos's papers after her death. Elena Poniatowska includes a portion of it in her prologue to *Cartas a Ricardo* as an example of Castellanos's ambiguous relationship, first to Ricardo Guerra, Castellanos's husband, and then to Gabriel, Castellanos's son, whom Castellanos had previously addressed or spoken of in poems such as "Rito de iniciación" y "Autoretrato" (Poniatowska 22). The ambiguity could be due to the patriarchal role of men in Castellanos's world view.

² Castellanos defended her thesis to obtain a master's in philosophy at the UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) in 1950. *Sobre cultura femenina* was published in 1950 in *América Revista Antológica* and then, not until 2005, by Fondo de Cultura Económica with a prologue by Gabriela Cano.

1.5 Thesis Outline

My thesis consists of three chapters, each one focuses on a country in which Castellanos travelled and lived either as a doctoral student, a professor or an ambassador, and from which she wrote either letters or journalism.³ In chronological order the chapters are: chapter one – Spain (1950-1951); chapter two – the United States (1966 – 1967) and chapter three – Israel (1971–1974). The letters from Spain and the United States are in *Cartas a Ricardo* (1994) and for the chapter on Israel, I focus on Castellanos’ journalism originally published in *Excelsior* and collected by Reyes in *Mujer de palabras: artículos rescatados de Rosario Castellanos*, Volume III.

In chapter one, by looking at Castellanos’s letters from 1950 to 1951 in *Cartas a Ricardo*, I analyse representations of Castellanos’s and her friend Dolores Castro’s roles as women travelling in Spain unaccompanied by men. I evaluate Castellanos’s reaction to the Moorish, Jewish and Catholic cultures in Spain in relation to her own complex legacy as a member of the land-owning class in Mexico. Through this lens, I argue that Castellanos negotiates the reflection of her own culture and her own place in it by comparing the history of Spain’s domination by the Catholic majority. I argue that Castellanos’s journey leads her to explore her relation to writing, religion and relationships via genre and the work of Santa Teresa. I also posit that Castellanos performs as a woman whose “love letters” are marked by ambivalence.

In chapter two, using as my primary source Castellanos’s letters (1966 – 1967) from *Cartas a Ricardo*, I look at the ways in which Castellanos resists U.S. culture in relation to food,

³ I am basing this study which covers Castellanos’s travel writing in a chronological manner because, although she was writing journalism beginning in 1948, when she was travelling, she didn’t publish journalism except with a few exceptions and her letters are not available, with a few exceptions, when she served as Mexican ambassador to Israel.

automation, language, academia, fashion, friendships and where she stands in relation to her writing, her husband and his infidelities, and her son. I posit that the letters to Guerra in which she writes of Gabriel reveal the ambiguities of her colonial legacy, and the overlapping norms of gender and class which unveil deep schisms in Mexican society. Because Castellanos arrived in the United States, specifically in Madison, Wisconsin, after an increasingly volatile time in which she had resigned as the Director of Press at the UNAM, I argue that the first semester she spends at the University of Wisconsin is characterised by an extreme sense of dislocation in regards to, among other things, American university culture, English language, geographical orientation and transportation, her dependence on pharmaceuticals, and her role as Guerra's wife and Gabriel's mother. I posit that, through her letters, she attempts to reconcile the trauma of dislocation and the residual violence she experienced both nationally and domestically.

In chapter three, using as my primary source *Mujer de Palabras: Artículos rescatados de Rosario Castellanos* volume III, I look at Castellanos's role as a representative of the Mexican state in Israel, a mother, an employer, a professor, and a writer. I argue that Castellanos continues to explore themes of language, culture, national identity, and motherhood in her journalism. I posit that, in Castellanos's journalism, there is a resurgence of themes from her letters from Spain and the United States, albeit in a different genre. I compare the strategies she employs in her journalism to those she uses her letters.

In the conclusion, I provide final reflections on how, in each of these three chapters, I examine Castellanos's contributions, through her complex letters and journalism, to Latin American nonfiction writing. This particular focus allows me to redefine her relevance, legacy, and role as a transnational woman writer in relation to the literary canon. Lastly, I engage with

and expand, from a critical perspective, the scholarship on twentieth-century Latin American nonfiction, with an emphasis on travel writing.

Chapter 2. *El recorrido inverso*: Castellanos's Letters from Spain (1950-1951)

El viaje de Ulises es el paradigma del retorno. La vuelta a casa. Un retorno implica la existencia de, por lo menos, dos elementos. Un territorio adónde volver, y alguien que espera (qtd. in Andradi 619).

Ya testimonio, ya relato de viaje, ya correspondencia, el viaje me permite ser (qtd. in Molloy 42).

2.1. The History of the Trip

In this chapter, I place the letters that Rosario Castellanos wrote from her postdoctoral year in Spain, posthumously published in *Cartas a Ricardo [Letters to Ricardo]* (1994), in a historical context. I argue that Castellanos's letters from Spain can be read as a combination of feminine autobiography and travel narrative and that the letters importantly allowed Castellanos the use of first person, and thereby the opportunity to create herself as a literary character. Although the letters can be read as love letters, this is only one reading. In fact, her letters present a woman who has moved beyond the confines of domesticity. Indeed, Castellanos, by traveling to Spain for a year with her best friend, prioritizes female friendship over romantic love.

In the fall of 1950, Castellanos travelled with Dolores Castro (1923-2022), to Spain on the S.S. Argentina, a ship under an Italian flag. The two women traveled third class, each with her own portable typewriter. Earlier that year, the two women had graduated from the UNAM, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, and Castellanos had been awarded a postdoctoral fellowship by the Institute of Spanish Culture. On being awarded the scholarship, Castellanos sold her first-class boat ticket and bought two third-class tickets so Castro could

accompany her. Castellanos's master's thesis, *Sobre cultura femenina*, dedicated to Castro, was published in the journal *Américas, Revista Antológica*. In Castellanos's collection of letters, *Cartas a Ricardo [Letters to Ricardo]* (1994) are some forty letters that Castellanos wrote from aboard the S.S. Argentina, from Spain and France, Italy, and Austria, to Ricardo Guerra Tejada (1927-2012) in Mexico.

On arriving in Madrid, Castellanos and Castro boarded at a women's residence and attended courses in art history, philosophy, and poetry at the Complutense University of Madrid. In addition to attending courses, they travelled extensively. They visited cities relatively close to Madrid, such as Salamanca, Toledo, and Segovia; they visited León and the region of Castile; they went to Valladolid and Ávila where Castellanos wrote that they saw "los sitios donde [Santa Teresa] tuvo sus éxtasis" [110] and they travelled by train to Andalusia – the traditional tourist route – stopping at Córdoba, Sevilla, and Granada. On the break from classes at Christmas, they went by train to Paris, stopping off at San Sebastián. In May 1951, when classes ended and the women's residence in Madrid closed, they travelled to France, Italy, Austria, Germany, and Holland, then returning to Mexico via New York City.

Castellanos, by accepting the scholarship from the Spanish government, indefinitely postponed the state-sanctioned institution of marriage. In addition, by giving up her first-class ticket and buying two third-class tickets for herself and Castro, she privileges female friendship. Indeed, if, historically, the two legitimate places for adult women were either in the convent or in a marriage, travel offered young women like Castellanos and Castro a third choice.

2. 2 The Meaning of the Letter

We might infer that the letter-writer revealed as much in the appearance as in the contents of the missive – and perhaps more. The letters themselves are witness...to the expectations of the age... (qtd. in Favret 135).

In this section, I argue that when she makes the decision to accept the scholarship and travel to Europe with her best friend, Castellanos prioritizes both her friendship with Castro, and her own intellectual development and need to leave Mexico, over and above a flesh-and-blood relationship with Guerra. In lieu of the actual physical relation, she endeavours, through her letters, to maintain a romantic relationship. In her letters, she portrays herself as adventurous, interesting, intellectual, funny, and perhaps most importantly, loyal.

The S.S. Argentina departed from the Mexican port city of Veracruz. Before crossing the Atlantic, it made three stops: the first in Cartagena, Colombia; the second, on the island of Curaçao, and the third, in El Guairá, Venezuela. After crossing the Atlantic, the ship stopped at Tenerife, before arriving at Barcelona where Castro and Castellanos disembarked. The trip took approximately three weeks. At each port, Castellanos mailed letters to Ricardo Guerra. In her first letter, sent from Cartagena, she included a portrait of herself.⁴ The portrait, like the letters Castellanos mails to Guerra, is a physical representation of herself. An exchange of portraits between two people implies a commitment to a relationship. Her self-portrait and, more

⁴ S.S. Argentina, October 3, 1950: “Desde Cartagena le envié dos cartas y sendos retratos, ¿los recibió usted? Espero que sí y que a estas horas ya estén en sus manos y cerca de usted como yo quisiera estar” (*Cartas* 44).

importantly her letters, in the absence of the loved one, acquire a metonymic quality, that is to say, they stand in for the person herself.

In the above quote, Favret, when writing of Jane Austen's letters, emphasizes the appearance of the letter. The letter acts as a container for a message, but it is also a message in and of itself because someone has sent it out into the world. To send out a message, is always an act of blind faith. This is the blind faith which I will speak of later. As Emily Dickinson famously wrote, "This is my message to the world/that never wrote to me." In a similar vein, I wish to emphasize the regularity with which Castellanos wrote Guerra when she travelled to Europe and the corresponding attention which she brought to the act of mailing her letters. In Castellanos's letters to Guerra written from the S.S. Argentina, she often opens with the logistics of where she can mail each letter, these logistics include the details of each port and the restrictions she encounters. For instance, from a letter dated October 3, 1950: "Entre mis planes estaba al mandarle una hermosa carta de Curacao pero resulta que llegamos allí a las diez de la noche y a esa hora no hay ninguna clase de correos a nuestra disposición" (*Cartas* 44). Or: "¿Ha recogido usted mis cartas anteriores? Le puse una en Cartagena (mejor dicho, dos), y otra en La Guaira y una tarjeta postal de allí mismo" (*Cartas* 54). The focus that Castellanos places on the act of mailing the letters would indicate that in the course of her transatlantic journey it is of vital importance to her that Guerra receives the letters that she sends him and, that by this means, she maintains a connection with him.

In addition, in a letter dated October 15, 1950, Castellanos conflates the passion she professes for Guerra with her commitment to sending him letters:

Mi querido niño Ricardo:

Lo amo en una forma tan escandalosa como poco prudente y de ese modo me decidí a enviarle mis cartas desde Tenerife. ¿Las recibió usted? Eran tres...Bueno, pues fíjese que llegamos a Tenerife como a las diez de la noche y ya nos habíamos informado en el barco que podrían ellos enviar la correspondencia y nos habían dicho que no y que el servicio, en este sentido, no era de ningún modo de fiar. Así es que estábamos todas desconsoladas y ya nos habíamos resignado cuando, en el momento de bajar, subió una niña española vendiendo timbres, pegándolos ella misma en las cartas y metiéndolas a un buzón especial y autorizado. De todos modos, nos dio un poco de desconfianza. Pero en fin. *Había que arriesgarse*. Dígame por favor, cuando me escriba, cuántas cartas mías recibió en total, y de dónde. (*Cartas* 61; my emphasis)

The above cited passage, with its description of mailing a letter and its emphasis on risk, contains all the drama of a longed-for reunion: the initial disappointment and sadness, followed by the seemingly miraculous appearance of a young Spanish-speaking woman who not only sells stamps but carries with her the allegedly state-authorized means to mail letters. The act of mailing a letter resembles an in-person encounter.

By means of the consistency with which Castellanos writes and mails her letters she creates a trail of objects, a line of documents, that publicly state her allegiance to Guerra. She posts a letter, and it travels to Guerra's residence in Mexico City. The letter leaves her hands and begins its own journey out into the world. Just as the "I" in the letters no longer remains a private

person once the letter is sent out, so, too, does the letter as a document no longer remain private once it enters into circulation through various international postal systems (Favret 132).⁵

When Castellanos asks Guerra about the letters he has received, she attempts to ascertain if both sides of the contract are being upheld. By detailing the date of each letter, she gives him the opportunity to communicate to her if he has indeed received the letters she has sent or if a letter has been lost. When she tells him that she will write him irrespective of whether he writes her back or not, she reiterates her loyalty to him; each letter, regardless of its contents, serves as a statement of their alliance. Therefore, because letters were traditionally concerned with the absence of the other – indeed, “[c]oncern with separation is endemic to letters” (Decker 160) – the loss of a letter can also be a kind of death. In a letter dated October 11, 1950, Castellanos writes:

No sé si decidirme a confiar en los marinos que depositan sus cartas en una agencia o esperar a llegar a Barcelona. Sería más seguro, aunque menos rápido. Sentiría yo tanto que no recibieras una carta mía, que se perdiera; no porque sea interesante ni esté bien hecha sino porque *quiero que sepas y que veas* que no te olvido ni un momento, que todo el tiempo pienso en ti. (*Cartas 57*; my emphasis)

Notwithstanding the fact that Castellanos was the one to leave, she acknowledges the loss of the other. In Castellanos’s case, that loss becomes an obsessive concern that she attempts to ameliorate by writing letters. In a letter dated October 3, 1950, she writes that she imagines her letter touching a part of Guerra’s cheek. When Castellanos chastises Guerra for the lack of letters

⁵ See Favret on Wollstonecraft’s *Letters from Sweden*: “Once it leaves the home, once it enters the marketplace, the letter no longer delivers a private individual for scrutiny – in fact, the *Letters from Sweden* frustrate scrutiny. Instead, the letter performs a social act, diffusing the self into the world, making it public property. And that worldly self demands a public reckoning” (132)

which he sends her, she mourns the absence of the person that his letters would represent. When she does receive Guerra's letters, they provide comfort and his words afford satisfaction, and she writes of her happiness.⁶ Meanwhile, the letters which she writes to him serve to bridge the distance between them as she travels further away in time and space.

Not only is Castellanos the one to leave, but it would also appear that she has gone ahead with the plans to go to Europe without including Guerra in her decision. In a letter dated August 5, 1950, Comitán, she writes: "No hablemos de este viaje. En los últimos días he llegado a una conclusión muy tranquilizadora. Es un secreto, no se lo confíe a nadie pero España no existe. Es un mero engaño de los mapas. Fíjese qué suave" (*Cartas* 31). In this letter, Castellanos divides herself. She writes of her dedication and her love for Guerra while making plans to leave Mexico for a year. One self eclipses the other, because both selves cannot be visible simultaneously just as Spain cannot exist on a map. Castellanos will continue to rely on this act of division in her mostly one-sided correspondence.

The letter serves as physical proof of the relation between Castellanos and Guerra. By means of the letter, Castellanos attempts to secure her relation to him. Castellanos is the traveler, dependent on the occasionally suspect international postal systems and the temporal delay between their communications while Guerra remains in Mexico. He constitutes the person of whom Andradi speaks in the epigraph to this chapter, one of the necessary elements for a traveler's return: someone who waits. Because historically the person waiting for the traveler's

⁶ "Hoy, en el momento que salíamos para la escuela, recibí su carta. La había esperado con tanta ansia, estaba tan impaciente por recibirla, que al principio no podía leerla. Estaba temblando y tenía unas ganas horribles de llorar. Caminando con ella, sin abrirla, saboreando todo lo posible haberla recibido, estuve en todo el camino a la Facultad. La abrí después y la he leído. Estoy feliz, absolutamente feliz con ella. Es de lo más suave y tal como yo la quería...quisiera yo detenerme el momento de exaltación y de dicha que ella me ha proporcionado y permanecer así todo el tiempo hasta que volviéramos a vernos" (*Cartas* 75).

return is a woman, as in the case of Ulysses and Penelope, Castellanos, as the one to leave, in reversing the gender roles, has rewritten the traditional travel narrative.

2.3 The Epistolary Genre and the National Allegory

In this section, I explore the place of letters in literature and how women travelers like Castellanos who have used letters to expand the idea of the national plot. Letters, such as Castellanos's anthologized in *Cartas a Ricardo*, have traditionally been considered a minor genre. Indeed, it is the very liminality of the genre which serves as a point of entry.

Both William Decker in *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America before Telecommunications* and Jean Franco in *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* address letters' place in national literature. Decker highlights the historical position attributed to the letter from a canonical perspective as "a subliterature traditionally considered ancillary to major achievement" (17).⁷ In turn, Franco categorizes letters as belonging to "a genre that occupies an ambiguous place between secrecy and privacy" (39). The ambiguity of the epistolary genre rests on several factors, including the fact that letters, at one time written to a specific individual, can be published in a book. By anthologizing letters, as in the case of *Cartas a Ricardo*, they are made available to a wider reading public. (I will further address the anthologizing of letters in the section on the role of the editor.) Before she died, Castellanos took possession of the letters which she had written to Guerra and directed that, after her death, they be published as a collection (Ascencio 9). When she wrote the letters from Spain, Castellanos

⁷ Decker also acknowledges the influence of letters: "Volumes of letters have appeared steadily since the sixteenth century, but nothing compares with the scale of letter publication over the course of the twentieth century" (7).

was relatively young and had not published what would come to be considered her canonical work,⁸ but she had achieved academic and literary success, with the scholarship to Spain being her latest achievement. In a letter to Guerra dated April 25, 1971, she lists her literary accomplishments because, from Mexico, Guerra needed this information to apply for another scholarship on her behalf. In another gender role reversal, Guerra aided Castellanos in securing the necessary documents for the advancement of her career.⁹ When Castellanos was twenty-five in Spain, her literary accomplishments were not insignificant. Castellanos's letters from Spain were, therefore, written by a woman with a significant literary ambition and a history of publications. And, due to this experience, Castellanos was aware of the role of gender in literary production.

Franco argues that the Mexican national allegory – until fragmented in 1968 with the student massacre at Tlatelolco Plaza – upheld the myth of a governing paternal authority. When Franco reflects on the failure of Castellanos's second novel *Oficio de tinieblas* (1962) [*The Book of Lamentations*], she states: "It is not possible to retain verisimilitude and make young women into national protagonists" (146). Unlike the novel, which is often understood as the genre of national modernity, the genre of letters, precisely because it was a minor genre existing outside the national plot, allowed an entry point for women writers. Sara Mills in *Discourses of Difference: Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, argues that many women travelers' accounts "were written in the form of letters or diaries or a mixture of the two" (103).

⁸ What would be considered Castellanos's Chiapas cycle: the novels *Balún Canán* and *Oficio de tinieblas*; the short story collections: *Ciudad Real*; *Los convidados de agosto*; as well as her play, *El eterno femenino* and much of her poetry.

⁹ From the content of Castellanos's letters in *Cartas a Ricardo*, it appears that Guerra played a large part not only in helping her with securing scholarships, but also in negotiating Castellanos's future teaching contracts with UNAM.

In Castellanos's graduate thesis, *Sobre cultura femenina*, when speaking of Gabriela Mistral's and Virginia Woolf's contributions to culture, she inquires: "¿Cómo lograron introducir su contrabando en fronteras tan celosamente vigiladas" (83)? By writing travel letters, Castellanos, like many women travelers have done before her, can be the subject. By dedicating her time to writing letters, with "[e]l uso de la primera persona, tan necesario, como se ha dicho, para lograr la adhesión del lector en los relatos de viaje" (Molloy 15), Castellanos creates a space for her writerly self or "su contrabando," a space that has not been traditionally permitted in the allegorical novel.

2.4 The Role of the Editor

By necessity, a collection of letters needs an editor or, as Decker argues, "readers of a published letter expect to be prompted by an editorial hand" (9). Rosa María Burrola Encinas, in her essay "*Cartas a Ricardo; el discurso de la utopía amorosa*," looks at how an editor can influence a collection of letters. Just as I do in this chapter, an editor will privilege one reading above another. To examine an editor's influence on the narrative of published letters, Burrola Encinas uses the example of Emil Volek, who edited the collection of letters *Tu amante ultrajada no puede ser tu amiga; cartas de amor, novela epistolar*, by the Cuban writer Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814-1873). Burrola Encinas argues that the title of this collection of letters, with its emphasis on betrayal, encourages readers to see the overarching narrative as one of love and revenge. She contends that Volek's influence as editor of the collected letters of Gómez de Avellaneda resembles the influence of Elena Poniatowska on *Cartas a Ricardo*. Poniatowska did not, in fact, edit *Cartas a Ricardo*, but her twelve-page prologue dominates the one-page "presentación" by the actual editor, Juan Antonio Ascencio. In her prologue to *Cartas a Ricardo*,

Poniatowska supplies a number of biographical facts, which Burrola Encinas argues, circulate around the letters. These biographical facts enable us to read the collection of letters more easily as the “story of a life” (125).

Poniatowska begins by comparing Castellanos’s letters to Guerra to those of Mariana Alcoforado.¹⁰ Of Alcoforado’s letters, Poniatowska contends: “la monja portuguesa canta el amor a una sola voz. También Rosario Castellanos canta su amor en un solo sostenido y doliente que conforma su biografía” (11). She adds: “¿Qué mayor prueba de que muchas mujeres lo apostamos todo al amor que este documento epistolar? Nunca hubo otro hombre en la vida de Rosario; sólo Ricardo, siempre Ricardo. La suya es una inmensa carta de amor y desesperación que dura los 17 años de su convivencia y más...” (11).

However, reading the documents as love letters lends them only one interpretation. As Favret argues regarding Wollstonecraft’s *Letters from Sweden*, “biographical glosses on the *Letters* can obscure the artistic scheme of the work” (115). I maintain that with Castellanos’s letters from Spain; Poniatowska’s biographical comments focusing on Castellanos’s relation to Guerra have obscured the aesthetic elements of her letters.

2.4.1 Poniatowska’s “Editorial Hand”

It is interesting to note that Poniatowska published two books loosely based on women’s correspondence during the *sexenio* of López Portillo (1976-1982): *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* and *Gaby Brimmer*.¹¹ As a somewhat marginal figure, Castellanos resembles both

¹⁰ Mariana Alcoforado is a Franciscan nun who was believed to have written letters to a French officer. The letters were originally published in French in Paris in 1669 as *Les Lettres Portugaises* and are generally considered a work of fiction written by Gabriel-Joseph de la Vergne.

¹¹ See Claudia Schaefer’s essay, “Updating the Epistolary Canon: Bodies and Letters, Bodies of Letters in Elena Poniatowska’s *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* and *Gaby Brimmer*,” in *Textured Lives: Women, Art and Representation in Modern Mexico*, The University of Arizona Press, 1992.

Angelina Beloff, on whose letters *Querido Diego* is based, and Gaby Brimmer. Schaefer argues that in her novels based on the letters of Beloff and Brimmer: “Poniatowska inverted the emphasis from ‘outside’ events to ‘inner’ life as she took a marginal text – marginal at least in its accessibility to a vast field of readers – and turned it into a public narrative” (65). Thereby, Poniatowska, by taking Castellanos’s collection of letters and framing the narrative as a story of a lifelong obsession with one man, personalizes Castellanos’s story and subsequently depoliticizes it. When Poniatowska states that that there was only ever one man in Castellanos’s life, she places the focus of the collected letters on Castellanos’s relationship with Guerra. Indeed, Schaefer’s analysis of the ways in which Poniatowska constructed her novels based on women’s letters – “The terms on which these women’s stories are to be construed by the reading public are Poniatowska’s” – is relevant when looking at Poniatowska’s editorial influence on the reading of *Cartas a Ricardo* (65).

In the prologue to *Cartas a Ricardo*, Poniatowska continues to give priority to Castellanos’s biography, and so to the personal story at the expense of the political context: “[I]as cartas son un proceso liberador y un triunfo, una guerra compuesta de muchas batallas ganadas por ella misma día a día. Me atrevería a afirmar que, si no supiéramos de su prosa ni de su poesía, sus solas cartas harían de Rosario Castellanos un ser humano admirable” (*Cartas* 19). Indeed, Poniatowska privileged Castellanos’s story as a woman obsessively in love. This traditional love story is perhaps more easily consumed than the story of a woman who goes to Europe with her best friend.

When Poniatowska posits that Castellanos’s letters alone would make her an admirable human being, she conflates literature and autobiography and thereby shows her reluctance to confer to the letters their full literary value. I argue that this reluctance is based on the

eighteenth-century notion of which Favret speaks, which does not allow feminine letters a space in the world but, rather, confines them to a traditional feminine sphere. The eighteenth-century notion of women's letters placed the emphasis on the individual woman's struggles, thereby distancing the woman letter writer from the political sphere in which she lived and wrote. Because of the often-held idea that a woman's letters exist in a personal sphere, the reading of Castellanos's letters can limit them to what is traditionally considered the personal, the feminine, the literature of the "cardiogramme" or "registers for the movement of the heart" (Jean Rousset, qtd in Favret 57). In other words, as Mills and Favret argue, the letters of women travelers like Castellanos are usually read as letters by exceptional beings who exist outside of history (*Discourses* 4).¹²

When speaking of Castellanos's letters, Poniatowska notes: "Aspecto notable es el humor, incluso, o mejor dicho, sobre todo a costa de sí misma, y *esto no abunda entre las escritoras mexicanas....*" (*Cartas* 19; emphasis added). Poniatowska could well have added, "ni en las novelas ni la poesía de Castellanos."¹³ Indeed, Castellanos successfully employs the literary conventions afforded by letters, such as the seeming spontaneity, humor, the performative nature with the development of the "I" as a personality, etc. It is true that Castellanos deploys humor at her own expense in her letters. She affectively uses humor to create the personality who wrote the letters, often, as Poniatowska suggests, by making fun of herself. The epistolary genre allows for Castellanos's use of irony more so than in the allegorical

¹² See Mills: "The way these texts [women's travel writing within the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries] have been read has been primarily 'realist', that is they are not analysed as textual artifacts, but rather as simply autobiographies" (4).

¹³ Castellanos's first two novels, especially her second novel, *Oficio de tinieblas*, are full of cruelty, especially towards unmarried women who stray and Indigenous people. The plot of *Oficio de tinieblas*, the sacrifice of an Indigenous child in imitation of the sacrifice of Christ, is particularly grim.

novel. Indeed, Castellanos's wicked sense of satire is apparent; for example, in her description of two young former residents who come to the pension that she and Castro stay at in Madrid. She makes fun of the conservative mores of one, a dentist, on talking of his girlfriend. She also imitates the dentist's overly correct Spanish with 'aprietarla' and 'dedució':

Él amaba profundamente la ortografía y se había hecho novio de una chica sólo porque ella no cometía faltas de esta índole ortográfica cuando le escribía cartas. Porque él era muy exigente en esta cuestión. Y del hecho de que una vez trató de "aprietarla" y ella se resistió "dedució" que era una chica muy honrada. (*Cartas* 160)

This quote on the dentist's old-fashioned use of Spanish and morals is an example of the outward-facing scenes that abound in *Cartas*. The letters, with the emphasis on the addressee, "querido Ricardo," and the use of humor, also resemble Castellanos's journalism. Castellanos employs the epistolary form in many of her newspaper articles, including the posthumously published article in which she uses the epistolary form to address her son Gabriel.

Of Castellanos's letters, Poniatowska also contends: "Las cartas de Rosario son devastadores, estrujantes, obsesivas, oro molido para psiquiatras, psicólogos, analistas, biógrafos y, ¿por qué no?, críticos literarios" (*Cartas* 11). Although Poniatowska prioritizes a romantic reading of the letters, with this quote she acknowledges the multiple readings that the letters potentially allow. Because I read the letters as literature, I maintain that the epistolary genre has allowed Castellanos to create herself as a literary character and that the letters therefore belong to the genre of female autobiography. They allow Castellanos, as a Mexican woman, an entry into the national allegory. Castellanos's travel letters break the boundaries of the traditional roles presented to women of marriage, domesticity, and child rearing.

2.4.2 Historical Context

In fact, in the association between the sentimental letter and the travel letter, Castellanos's letters travel between these two poles. Although her letters often begin and end with a paragraph in which she expresses her love for Guerra, the body of the letter is composed of outward-facing scenes. These scenes include descriptions of the places where Castellanos travelled and a broad cast of characters (for instance, the passengers on the ship, the Latin Americans she meets in Spain and who, traveling in Europe, visit her and Castro,¹⁴ the women in the residence in Madrid and her constant companion Dolores Castro). In her letters, she shows her reliance on other people, specifically Castro. When Pedro Coronel, Castro's boyfriend, visits, Castellanos describes their relationship (*Cartas* 126). Castellanos writes in detail about the plays of Calderón de la Barca which she reads in the library of the women's residence in Madrid. She notes the letters that she receives from people in Mexico, such as her stepbrother Raúl, her godmother, and her contemporaries, which include Emilio Carballido (1925-2008) and Wilberto Cantón (1925 – 1979). She describes meeting Octavio Paz at the Mexican Embassy in Paris; he takes Castellanos and Castro to cafés where he introduces them to Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. She visits many galleries, including the Prado, and seeing many films and plays. She summarizes the plots of plays or movies she sees, often humorously, or describes visual elements, such as when she and Castro attended a production of *Don Juan Tenorio* in Madrid with sets designed by Salvador Dalí. Thereby, in describing the culture of Madrid, the food at the residence, etc. in her letters to Guerra, in outward-looking scenes, Castellanos places herself in a specific cultural,

¹⁴ The friends who visited Castellanos and Castro, members of her cultural circle, who were also travelling and studying in Europe, include: Luis Villoro, philosopher, and writer (1922-2014) Pedro Coronel, visual artist (1923-1985).

historical, and political context. Indeed, more than a writer of mere love letters, she positions herself as a transnational writer following the tradition of other twentieth-century Latin American women travelers who travelled extensively in Europe.

2.5 The Monstrous Self

Y creo que ahora nunca sabré estarme quieta en mi casa, que siempre querré estar caminando, yéndome a alguna parte, y analizando esto me doy cuenta de que lo que busco a través de esto no es tanto aprender cosas ni mirar gentes y paisajes nuevos sino olvidar que existo (qtd. in *Cartas* 201).

I perceived, as the shape came nearer (sight tremendous and abhorred!) that it was the wretch whom I had created ... He approached; his countenance bespoke bitter anguish, combined with disdain and malignity, while its unearthly ugliness rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes.

“Devil,” I exclaimed, “do you dare approach me? And do you not fear the fierce vengeance of my arm wreaked on your miserable head ... Begone vile insect” (qtd. in Shelley 148).

Castellanos writes of her need to forget herself. With movement she can attain something that cannot be obtained by staying still. An image that she often uses to refer to herself is that of an insect under a microscope – an image that invokes stasis. She uses this insect image in her first letter to Guerra from the S.S. Argentina: “Pero no me siento, bajo tu mirada, como bajo la mirada de los demás, como un insecto bajo un microscopio...” (*Cartas* 38). In addition to the

image of an insect, Castellanos often refers to herself as a monster. Despite their differences, the monster an allegorical figure and the insect something that lives among us, both the insect and the monster share the quality of being something potentially repugnant to humans. Indeed, Frankenstein calls his monster a “vile insect,” even though as the monster approaches him, he has perceived the monster’s stature “to exceed that of man” (148). An insect can be easily stamped out, as Frankenstein desires to stamp out his monster and in this desire, he conflates the monster with an insect. When Castellanos evokes the monster or the insect, it is with the sensation of being looked at and found to be freakish. By likening herself to a monster or an insect, Castellanos perceives herself as not human.

When she is in Madrid, Castellanos tells Guerra that she has returned to her play, *Tablero de damas* [Checkerboard] (1957), and in this endeavor, she categorizes herself as a monster: “Estoy completamente obsesionada en esto. No puedo pensar en otra cosa, no entiendo nada de lo que me dicen, me siento incómoda en todas partes y sólo quisiera escribir. Si pudiera, sería feliz. Pero soy *monstrua*. No puedo” (*Cartas* 143; emphasis added). As a woman obsessed by her play, she is not human, nor is she fully feminine. In other words, the writing self is freakish. As Barbara Johnson posits in her essay on Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818): “The monstrousness of selfhood is intimately embedded within the question of female autobiography” (190). More specifically, the image of the monster surfaces in response to women’s autobiography with its inherent conflict “to describe a difficulty in conforming to a female ideal, which is largely a fantasy of the masculine, not the feminine imagination” (190). In Castellanos’s conflict to write; again, the two irreconcilable selves surface: the social self and the artistic self. With the self-referential images, of the monster and the insect, Castellanos presents herself as not fully human.

How does Castellanos escape but through travel and in her travels, by writing, and by not, as she says, “quedarme quieta en mi casa.”

Ironically, by leaving Guerra behind, Castellanos can avoid further scrutiny. She can become the subject, not the object. And in so doing, she can write a place for herself outside of masculine autobiography. When traveling, as she says in the quote that begins this section – *no estarme quieta en mi casa* –, Castellanos frees herself from *la mirada de los demás*. She exists in an in-between place. The people who are scrutinizing her under a microscope are left behind in Mexico.¹⁵ Once in Spain, in the women’s residence where she has settled for a relatively long period of time and working on her play, she again comes up on her divided self and she writes Guerra: “No puedo pensar en otra cosa, no entiendo nada de lo que me dicen, me siento incómoda en todas partes y sólo quisiera escribir (Cartas 143). She is a monster; she can never fully escape social norms.

2.6 Self-Presentation

Prior to leaving Mexico, in a letter dated August 15, 1950, Castellanos wrote to Guerra:

Usted sabe que tuve un hermano y que se murió y que mis padres, aunque nunca me lo dijeron directa y explícitamente, de muchas maneras me dieron a entender que era una injusticia que el varón de la casa hubiera muerto y que en cambio yo continuara viva y coleando. Siempre me sentí un poco culpable de existir; durante todos esos años

¹⁵ In a letter to Guerra dated August 15, 1950, from La Concordia, Chiapas, Castellanos writes: “Y todavía los otros cacareando alrededor de uno; diciéndole en su cara ‘poetisa’ como el peor insulto y la peor burla” (*Cartas* 37). The use of the word “poetisa,” an aberration of the word “poeta” would seem to objectivize Castellanos because she is a woman who is also a writer. Perhaps “poetisa” here can be compared to “insecto” or “monstruo” in representing something freakish, not fully human, apart.

hubiera querido pedir perdón a todos por estar viviendo y me sentía yo culpable en cierto modo de que las cosas hubieran sucedido de ese modo y no del otro que ellos deseaban. Además, constantemente me echaban en cara que si yo no hubiera vivido ellos hubieran podido tranquilamente suicidarse pero que yo los ataba a una vida que no deseaban y que soportaban sólo por su sentido del deber. (*Cartas* 36)

In this extraordinary recounting of her childhood, Castellanos plays on sentiment, positioning herself as an unwanted child. The transformation from this position to that of a seasoned traveler who has overcome many hardships, allows her to participate in a narrative which captures the reader's imagination. Her initial stance, that of an unwanted child, also comes in direct contrast with a woman who has been awarded a one-year scholarship based on her academic performance. In this same letter, Castellanos has told Guerra –writing in a language that is not recognizable as that of an academic scholar but more like that of an awkward young woman, thereby belying her achievements—that she had known about the scholarship but had not wanted to mention it to him: “Pero no quise hacer ninguna alusión porque soy una cobarde que bueno” (*Cartas* 35). In addition, in this same letter, Castellanos positions herself not only as intellectually inferior to Guerra but as belonging to a gender that needs masculine protection. Although she has decided to make the trip to Europe with Castro, in her letters, she reconstructs the beginning of their relationship. Indeed, she uses the letters to mourn their time together, for instance when she knew him when she was a philosophy student at the National University, and he was studying as well as teaching.

Porque usted tiene su disciplina filosófica de una solidez que soy capaz de apreciar midiéndola con la superficialidad de un rayo de luna sobre los mares con la que yo pasé por la facultad. Y aparte su sensibilidad artística y sus clásicos bien leídos y

muchas cosas más. Me sentía yo pues en este aspecto toda satisfecha y colmada. Y en los otros también. Como mujer, que se supone un ser débil e indefenso, confiaba en usted y en sus fuerzas. (*Cartas* 35)¹⁶

In this quote, Castellanos, using false modesty, places herself as not being Guerra's intellectual equal. This despite the fact that she has completed and presented her thesis before him.¹⁷

However, she implies that she gains her sense of self, not from her own accomplishments, but from Guerra's erudition. This whole passage is steeped in ingenuity, and it is hard to believe that she is fooling anyone. A component of this story is the impending trip to Europe where Castellanos will leave him. In addition, as Miseres posits in *Mujeres en tránsito*, the pilgrimage to Europe "representaba tanto una experiencia y formación en el mundo de la cultura occidental como un símbolo cultural de pertenencia a una clase o un grupo social determinada – *la ciudad letrada* – latinoamericana" (215). By accepting the scholarship to Europe, Castellanos will take her place in "la ciudad letrada." From the newfound authority that her identity as a traveler provides her, Castellanos, in her first letter from the S.S. Argentina, writes: "Es necesario que usted haga un viaje por mar; no se imagina usted lo maravilloso que es. Se siente uno todo importante y persona de mundo, se conoce tanta gente y se oye hablar de tantas cosas" (*Cartas* 40). Along the same lines, in an interview from the 1960s entitled "Los narradores ante el público,"¹⁸ a mature Castellanos speaks of her decision to accept the scholarship to Spain and the

¹⁶ The trope of modesty is characteristic in women's letters to men. We can see evidence of false modesty in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *Carta Atenagórica* to the Bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz on the messianic Jesuit priest, Father Antonio Vieira's sermon. See Josefina Ludmer, "Las tretas del débil," in *La sartén por el mango*, Patricia Elena González and Eliana Ortega, eds. (Huracán, 1984), pp. 47-54.

¹⁷ "¿Cómo va tu tesis? Ojalá se recibiera pronto: ojalá pudiera venir muy pronto" (85)

¹⁸ This interview is published in a collection entitled *Rosario Castellanos: Rosario memorable* (2012), and there is no information on when it was originally published but it would be sometime after 1964, as Castellanos mentions publishing her collection of short stories, *Los convidados de agosto* [The Guests of August] (1964).

corresponding disapproval that met her decision: “Recuerdo que muchos – entre otros Leopoldo Zea – desaprobaron esta aceptación de un favor hecho por un gobierno con el cual el nuestro no sostenía relaciones.¹⁹ Yo no hice caso de ninguno de los argumentos...” (*Rosario memorable* 178).

Therefore, by accepting the scholarship, Castellanos places herself in opposition to the national political discourse and against the advice of Zea, a senior professor in the Department of Philosophy at the UNAM. The voice of the interview is the voice of a woman who makes her own decisions notwithstanding the opposing views of others in her circle. This example also shows how Castellanos uses the letters as a means of self-presentation. If in her letter to Guerra dated August 15, 1950, she presents herself as “[c]omo mujer, que se supone un ser débil e indefenso” (35), in the interview some fifteen years later, she presents herself as someone, who at the time of her departure to Europe, proceeded as she saw fit. In addition, in her letters from Spain, Castellanos often presents herself in alliance with other travelers, specifically male travelers. Indeed, at times she aligns herself with the traditional masculine model while rejecting the traditional feminine model of domesticity. When Castellanos and Castro arrive at the women’s residence in Madrid, they meet a Mexican woman, Laura Beatriz Benavides, with whom they will share a room. It appears that Benavides knows Guerra.²⁰ When Castellanos goes to the University in Madrid for the first time, she accompanies Benavides. On the campus they meet a Guatemalan student, Escobar, who graduated from the UNAM the previous year and who

¹⁹ Mexico officially terminated diplomatic relations with Spain in 1939 when Francisco Franco (1892-1975) came into power. Mexico had supported the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas sent aid, and the Mexican ambassador in France issued visas to Spanish Republicans to help them to emigrate to Mexico.

²⁰ “He aquí una muchacha mexicana a la que debes conocer pues ella te conoce: se llama Laura Beatriz Benavides” (*Cartas* 65).

Castellanos and Guerra both know. Castellanos allies herself with Escobar's masculine model and distances herself from the traditional image of the woman in a bourgeois home which

Benavides represents:

[Escobar] se ha paseado bastante. Ha estado en Francia, en Italia, en Suiza y en Austria. En cambio, Laura se pasa todo el día encerrada, arreglando su cuarto. No le gusta ir al cine ni al teatro ni a caminar por las calles ni a ninguna parte. Sólo va a sus clases y lee. En las vacaciones se fue a Marruecos. Estuvo en Roma cinco días y nada más. Yo no quiero desperdiciar mi viaje. Quiero ir a todas partes, estudiar mucho, leer mucho, conocer mucho. (*Cartas* 67)

Castellanos impresses on Guerra that she does not want to spend time in her room like Benavides. Rather, she prefers to travel extensively in Europe like Escobar. It is possible that she is appealing to Guerra, presenting herself as his intellectual equal in stating she does not identify with the feminine model. In insisting on her outings, she might wish to suggest to Guerra that she will be worthy of him. Although it is important to Castellanos to prove that she is intellectually worthy of Guerra, her propensity to make declarations about her absolute lack of interest in traditional domestic matters, specifically cooking and the kitchen—which I will further analyze in the next two chapters—, is a theme of her letters and journalism.

2.7 The Typewriter

Unacknowledged is that the journey will also provide an occasion for poetic performance not just loss (qtd. in Johnson 33).

In a letter dated October 3, 1950, Castellanos includes a description of herself writing a letter:

En este barco te racionan a uno el papel para escribir. A mí, cada vez que paso por la comandancia me preguntan, de broma, si no necesito papel. Tanta lata les doy pidiéndoselo. Ahora te he escrito en papel que les he escamoteado a las otras. Mientras ellas se divierten con los colombianos en la proa y el bar, yo, muy disimuladamente, me he pasado la mañana robándoles el papel y escribiéndote. (*Cartas* 49)

The majority of the letters in *Cartas a Ricardo* were typewritten,²¹ as attested by the above excerpt, in which Castellanos writes about herself sitting at her typewriter to compose a letter. This description might be read as a performance, something she does over and over again, which is in line with Judith Butler's assertion that "gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real" (xxxix). Castellanos specifically performs a woman writing letters to the man she loves. For spectators, there is the commissary staff, the boat's passengers and the letter's recipient, Guerra, all who form part of the discourse that Castellanos, as the writer of the letter, controls. One of the spectators, "el niño Pérez," is someone Guerra knows. "El niño Pérez" has criticized Castellanos for typing her letters: "El niño Pérez Marín se me ha acercado ahora para decirme que las cartas amorosas no se escriben a máquina. Pero es que él no conoce mi letra" (*Cartas* 54). In her next letter, Castellanos acknowledges not only the comment by "el niño Pérez" as well as the performative element of her use of the typewriter when she describes herself as being in a public place. There is also the possibility that her typewriter would have been noisy, which would provide an additional dimension to the performance of writing. In

²¹ A copy of a typewritten letter Castellanos wrote to Doris Dana, dated December 25, 1951, can be seen online in the Biblioteca Nacional del Chile digital archive. Castellanos's signature is handwritten. At this stage in my research, I have not been able to see any of the copies of the original letters from *Cartas a Ricardo*, nor ascertain where they are located. Nor have I been able to see copies of letters to other people she was writing when she was in Spain.

addition, using the typewriter to write letters to Guerra, as “el niño Pérez Marín,” sustains, rejects a certain intimacy.

Mi querido niño Guerra:

No por seguir los consejos del niño Flores Marín (aunque quién sabe, a lo mejor sí), sino por otros motivos, la cinta de la máquina está p’al tigre y además escribir aquí en máquina se convierte nada menos que en *un espectáculo público...* (*Cartas* 55; my emphasis)

In this letter, Castellanos presents herself as willing to adapt to expected norms of feminine behavior. These norms include writing love letters by hand, not with a typewriter. In his introduction to *Cartas a Ricardo*, the editor, Ascencio, makes the following claim of the editorial process: “El trabajo editorial fue lento, pero sin pausas. Aunque la mayoría de las cartas fueron mecanografiadas, la caligrafía de Rosario exige una paleografía carente de auxiliares” (*Cartas* 9). As evidenced by information in her letters, Castellanos was not just using her typewriter for her letters to Guerra, but she wrote to a number of people, including family members, for example her half-brother Raúl who managed her inherited properties. She worked on her play, *Tablero de damas* [Checkerboard] (1957), and wrote poetry.²² In other words, when studying in Spain, she is a working writer, and her letters to Guerra constituted only one aspect of her literary output. For her writing, she relied on her typewriter as an essential tool; it can thus be argued that it was essential to her identity.

²² “Terminé el hermoso *Tablero de damas* [...] Y además he hecho una pieza en tres actos absolutamente truculenta...[...]Aparte he terminado ya casi el mísero trabajo que dejaré antes de irme. Se llama *Aproximación a la actitud poética* y no debería llamarle también ensayo, sino mosaico, porque no ha sido el fusilamiento de un autor, sino la masacre de muchos” (*Cartas* 152).

It is also interesting to note that the typewritten letter is visually closer to the published manuscript than handwritten letters. If handwriting is closer to the human voice, then typewritten letters are closer to mechanical reproduction. Consequently, Castellanos's typewritten letters speak to the journey of her letters from letters written to one individual to their publication in a book. When a letter goes "from the autograph stage to the print transcription, the letter undergoes a genre change" (Decker 21). When talking about a letter's transformations, Decker uses the verb "passes," the verb often used when speaking of an individual's death and transition to an afterlife. The private letter, once published in a book, is, in effect, reborn. Finally, we might interpret Castellanos's use of the typewriter for her personal letters as an indication of her awareness of their potential for publication.

2.8 Castellanos and the North-South Divide

Todo viaje es, en principio, dislocación, exilio, desplazamiento (qtd in Ocampo 18).

Hemos estado viendo la costa de Africa, muy lejos (qtd in Castellanos, *Cartas* 99).

In this section, I address how Castellanos experienced Andalusia, and I contrast it with the cultural background in Chiapas, Mexico, of her childhood. Castellanos's father owned extensive land holdings in Chiapas. In the winter months, the family lived in Comitán, the southernmost city of Mexico, and in the summers, they migrated to one of their ranches, El Rosario near Ocosingo, or Chapatengo, in the interior, the region known as "las tierras calientes." The Indigenous people who lived and worked on the ranches, descendants of Mayans, spoke Tzotzil and Tzeltal. Under the socialist government of Lázaro Cárdenas (1936-1940), the family's lands were redistributed, and Castellanos and her parents migrated from Comitán to the urban center,

Mexico City, where she attended high school and the National University. Castellanos's only sibling, her younger brother Mario Benjamín, died when Castellanos was seven. Her parents died within a few weeks of each other in 1948, when she was 23 years old. Subsequently, her life, before reaching the age of 24—the age she would have been when leaving for Spain—, was marked by geographical and cultural displacement and by death.

In a letter to Guerra dated January 18, 1951, from Madrid, Castellanos tells him about her recent trip to Paris: “Fuimos al Museo del Hombre y yo quería llorar toda feliz y triste porque en una de sus vitrinas de arte precolombino había lanzas y vestidos de los lacandones y chamulas y retratos de sus chozas. Fíjese, ya no era siquiera México cuyo recuerdo me es más o menos soportable. Sino Chiapas, como quien dice *la mera entraña de uno*” (*Cartas 97*; emphasis added). Travel creates the condition of a double life: the life that one has left behind and the new one. With travel also comes the potential to achieve a different perspective. Some forty years earlier, another young Latin American woman, who “lleva[ba] el viaje en su sangre” (*La viajera 11*), Victoria Ocampo, in a letter to Delfina Bunge dated December 8, 1908, wrote from Paris of her emotional ties to her region:

Ahora extraño el sol, el cielo de mi tierra. Por primera vez comprendo que la tierra donde hemos nacido nos tiene atados. Quiero a América. Cuando pienso en el jardín de San Isidro, en sus flores (que están floreciendo en este mes), ¡qué nostalgia!

Me gusta París. Pero te escribo para hablarte de mis nostalgias de Buenos Aires...pues parecería que no quiero las cosas sino después de haberlas perdido. He pasado mi vida maldiciendo el presente y acariciando el pasado y el porvenir. (53)

Ocampo belonged to the group of literary Latin Americans for whom Paris constituted “la ciudad letrada,” as well. When Ocampo declares: “Quiero a América,” she places her

allegiance to her native continent. In reference to Ocampo's quote from the beginning of this section, travel has the potential to destabilize: to create the condition of a double life: "dislocación, exilio." It is while travelling in Paris that both Castellanos and Ocampo look to see what they have left behind. Indeed, to achieve this, the young women needed to retreat to an immense distance, like astronauts who from space for the first time see the planet earth. It is from the vantage point of Paris that the two women experience, on a visceral level, their deep attachment to Latin America and specify what defines it for them. For Castellanos, it is the tools and representations of the dwellings of the Indigenous people which speak to her, and for Ocampo, it is the memory of the flowers in San Isidro, her family's estate outside of Buenos Aires. Both Ocampo and Castellanos write as transnational writers with a foot in two worlds. As an epigraph to this section, I have also quoted from Castellanos's letter when, after the S.S. Argentina left the Straits of Gibraltar, she names Africa. Castellanos speaks to Africa's physical proximity to Spain and the period of Moorish rule of some eight hundred years—a rule which brought enormous influences to the peninsula in terms of agricultural, architectural, cultural, and scientific knowledge. It will thus be relevant to examine Castellanos's reaction to the cities she visits in Spain, especially Andalusia.

In Madrid, after returning from Paris, Castellanos writes to Guerra that both she and Castro have the craving to travel: "de pronto yo empecé a sentir un desasosiego que ya voy conociendo como síntoma que tengo que irme a alguna parte" (99). As a result, in the first week of February 1951, the two women go by train south to Córdoba, Seville, and Granada, cities which form a traditional route for tourists visiting Spain. Castellanos and Castro visit the mosques remaining from Moorish rule, including the Great Mosque of Córdoba ("la Mezquita"), and the Alhambra in Granada ("the red one"), the seat of Muslim rulers from the thirteenth

century to the end of the fifteenth century. They return to Madrid via Granada in an overnight mail train. They were travelling the route that many travelers had taken before them. Although not traditionally part of the Grand European tour, travelers had been visiting Andalusia since medieval times.²³

In the early 1950's, Spain was poor and isolated some ten years after the end of the Civil War (1936-1939), a war that placed family member against family member and in which over 200,000 people were killed. The violence that began during the Spanish Civil War, “would continue across the 1940s in many intense forms of institutionalized repression and discrimination through which the regime was constructed” (Graham 132). The scholarships awarded to students such as Castellanos constituted part of a weak attempt by Franco for Spain to be accepted in the international community. In fact, Castellanos and Castro, as two young women studying and traveling in Spain, would potentially have posed a disturbing challenge to the ruling fascist ideology. Franco, in common with other fascist dictators like Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) in Italy, believed in the supremacy of the family; the woman's role was to stay home, bear and raise children, all for the glory of the state.

Castellanos and Castro experience varying reactions on their trip to Andalusia and they appear to have been treated differently in the three Andalusian cities that they visit. In a long letter dated February 22, 1951, describing her trip, written once she's returned to Madrid, Castellanos writes in glowing terms of the Moorish architecture in each city and of Granada specifically:

²³ By the end of the nineteenth century, it was still not common for wealthy Latin American travelers to go to Spain. More specifically, Spain was noted for its bad food, uncomfortable means of travel, unfriendly men, demanding customs officers, dirty accommodations and being expensive (García y García 268). Indeed, a theme of Castellanos's letters is the paucity and poor quality of the food.

Porque es una ciudad a la que puedes amar. Es tan recogida, tan íntima, tan señora. Llena de arcos, de puertas y de puentes árabes...Pero Granada no sé como hablarte de ella para comunicarte esa sensación afectiva que se siente ante ella. Con sus ríos todos familiares y metiches y luego con que tú camines un poco y ya estás subiendo al Albaicín o a las otras colinas. Y detrás, enorme, blanca, la Sierra Nevada. (*Cartas* 105)

In Córdoba, Castellanos is impressed by the Mezquita, describing it in her letter to Guerra as “una maravilla, verdaderamente sobrecogedora, con [su] bosque de palmeras, sombrío y fresco, cientos de columnas [...] que te dan una impresión de sensualidad exquisita y delicada” (*Cartas* 102). Of the Jewish neighborhood in Córdoba, she only notes: “entramos en una sinagoga” (*Cartas* 102). Of Córdoba, Castellanos writes to Guerra that, in their hotel and on the street, she and Castro are treated as prostitutes,²⁴ possibly because of the rarity of two women travelling in Southern Spain unaccompanied by men. When Castellanos visits Sevilla, however she experiences a strong negative reaction.

Yo sentí, desde el primer momento por Sevilla una antipatía que jamás ninguna ciudad me había provocado. Y me imagino que fue porque llegamos al hotel que es uno de esos caserones antiguos, con sus techos más altos, paredes muy gruesas, habitaciones sombrías... El niño que nos acompañaba nos mostró *ese inmenso museo que es la*

²⁴ Here Castellanos shows her ability to make fun of herself by reframing an uncomfortable and potentially dangerous situation while presenting herself as adventurous because she is someone who can find humor in the catcalls and propositions that she and Castro are subjected to as women travelling unaccompanied by men. “Fuimos a un hotel que nos habían recomendado y todos nos veían con hostilidad pues por lo que se ve no están muy acostumbrados a ver que viajen mujeres solas. Nos sentíamos bastante incómodas por este motivo y porque en la calle nos decían nuestras cositas de lo peor suponiéndonos de un oficio que, dada nuestra situación, nos es imposible desempeñar. Realmente las personas que nos atribuyen actividades de vampiresas son demasiado optimistas y yo en el fondo me siento muy halagada” (Madrid, February 22, 1951 *Cartas*, 102).

ciudad: la calle de las Sierpes, el barrio de Santa Cruz, la torre de Oro, la de don Fadrique, el parque de María Luisa, el río Guadalquivir, todo turbio y navegable.

(*Cartas* 104; emphasis added)

On exiting the Alcázar in Sevilla, impressed by its beauty, she describes the rest of the city, using the rhetorical technique of similitude to compare Sevilla to what she considers to be typical of what appear to be negative aspects of Mexico: “Sales de allí y te topas con lo demás que es México. Las demás iglesias, los edificios, los barrios, el acento de las personas, su pereza, su afición al vino...” (*Cartas* 103). Historically, Sevilla served as the point of departure for ships leaving to the Americas. It was also the principal port where, at the end of the fifteenth century, Jews and Muslims were forced to board ships into exile, so that Columbus had great difficulty finding sailors for his expedition. Queen Isabelle (1474 -1504) established the Casa de Contratación in 1503 in Sevilla, which served as a center for the relations and commerce with the Indies, a fact that illustrates the historical importance of this city. Moreover, the *barrio* of Santa Cruz, which Castellanos categorizes as forming part of “*este museo inmenso que es la ciudad*,” was the old Jewish quarter in Seville. When Castellanos visited, it is likely that no efforts had been made to make it palatable to tourism and therefore she would have experienced a once vital neighbourhood, completely emptied of its former inhabitants.²⁵ In point of fact, the Jewish culture had been eradicated in Spain in what the historian Alain Milhou calls the “desemitization of Spain” (qtd. in Fuchs 20). In comparison, Mexico had not completely eradicated its Indigenous culture. Indeed, the state where Castellanos spent her childhood and adolescence, Chiapas, once part of Guatemala, had a relatively large population of Indigenous people. By

²⁵ Nowadays this neighbourhood is filled with bars and restaurants very popular with tourists.

1950, there had been some movement by the socialist government of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934 – 1940) to institute land reforms for Indigenous people.²⁶ Castellanos's background granted her an intimate knowledge of the Indigenous people who worked inside the house, and on her father's extensive land holdings, primarily her beloved "nana."

Castellanos's awareness thus conflicted with the ideology of the Franco regime with its emphasis on religious and ethnic homogeneity. In a letter to Guerra written from aboard the S.S. Argentina, she notes of a book that one of the Colombian scholarship students has lent to Castro:

[El libro] habla de las 'pretendidas culturas precolombinas (sic) y de que la historia de América empieza en la historia de España. Y cita pensadores tan eminentes como Vasconcelos, Guisa y Acevedo, Alfonso Junco, Méndez Plancarte,²⁷ etc. Definen la patria como "unidad de destino en lo universal" y creo que estas palabras son de Primo de Rivera. Para ellos el indio no tiene la menor importancia porque tampoco tuvo la menor existencia. Pero para nosotros el problema es muy diferente y mucho más complejo. (*Cartas* 60)

The irony Castellanos brings to the expression "pretendidas culturas precolombinas," in addition to the nostalgia she feels in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris when she sees the drawings of the

²⁶ This is the social movement that displaced Castellanos and her family from Comitán to Mexico City.

²⁷ All these writers mentioned here, at one time, either formed part of Franco's political regime or wrote in favor of the regime. See Graham, *The Spanish Civil War*: "[Franco's regime (1939 – 1975)] erected a repressive myth of a monolithic Spanish 'nation' born in the 15th century with the Catholic Kings, where hierarchy and cultural homogeneity, generated by interest Catholicism, had generated imperial greatness" (133).

dwellings of the “lacandonas” and “chamulas,” places her rhetorically in Mexico, specifically in the highlands of Chiapas,²⁸ impervious to the fascist ideology of the Falangists.²⁹

It appears from her letter recounting her trip to Andalusia, that upon meeting her contemporaries in Sevilla, Castellanos encounters a pervasive colonialist mentality among them:

Para ellos no ha pasado el tiempo. Sevilla es todavía el punto de unión entre España y América y están vueltos hacia nosotros con una ansiedad, con un interés verdaderamente lamentable. Hasta en sus expresiones se nota esta parálisis de la vida: cuando te dicen “en tiempos” tú tienes que sobreentender que es en tiempos pasados porque los otros no existen para ellos. (*Cartas* 103)

Castellanos’s antipathy towards Sevilla may relate to her own attempt to escape her identity as the daughter of a landowner obsessed with his Spanish ancestry. In the above quote, when she describes the law students she meets in Sevilla, she sees them as being heavily invested in Spain’s colonial relationship to the Americas. She perceives this colonial project as delusional, and considers the students as trapped in a poisoned, parasitic system - the paralysis that she signals as characteristic of everything including the students’ verbal expression. This is anathema to her since paralysis in language indicates stagnation and death. She thus contrasts the potential of her country, and of her own self, with the stasis she encounters among her contemporaries in

²⁸ Castellanos was raised by an Indigenous woman, Rufina, who looked after Castellanos and her brother. And until she married Ricardo Guerra at age thirty-three, she was accompanied by her long-time servant, María (Albores 3). As a child of the land-owning class, Indigenous women were central to Castellanos’s existence, so much so that on arriving at the women’s residence in Madrid where she learns that, as residents, they were responsible for keeping their rooms clean, washing and ironing their own clothes, she could write, with no hint of irony, to Guerra: “Yo estoy feliz de aprender a hacer todas esas cosas” (65).

²⁹ Franco idealized the period of Spanish colonial imperialism, after the Jews and Muslims had been expelled, and the Catholic Kings, Isabelle, and Ferdinand, reigned. From that time, money flowed into Spain from its colonies in Latin America, the Philippines, and parts of Africa. This period lasted until the independence of Spain’s former colonies in the nineteenth century.

Sevilla. In Castellanos's third novel, *Rito de iniciación*, with the protagonist's help, her father obsessively combs through documents pertaining to the family history. When this character, Cecilia Rojas, initially registers at the National University, she plans to study history so as to be better able to assist her father in his genealogical research. The confidence of the father in *Rito de iniciación* stems from the soldiers and explorers who left Sevilla to come to America—the distant ancestors of the indolent young men Castellanos meets in the Institute of Hispanic Culture in Sevilla.

In Sevilla, Castellanos does not have a place: “Yo me sentía en México. Pero no ese México en el que vivo ahora, todo suave y habitable, sino la provincia que viví cuando chica toda llena de fantasmas y angustias y de terror de morir. Allí revivieron todos esos sentimientos de los que ya ni siquiera me acordaba” (*Cartas* 103). In other words, the place she has created for herself in Mexico is in the metropolis, Mexico City, where she can study and work; it is not in the provinces where she lived as a child. For Castellanos, as opposed to the provinces, the city represents not a place of danger, but a place of possibility. In her provincial childhood she witnessed firsthand the limited roles allowed to women and girls like herself, as well as the mistreatment of the Indigenous people. More specifically, the Church maintained an iron grip over the lives of women. Castellanos, in her position as a visible member of the landowning class, would be under even tighter restrictions.

It is important to clarify that Castellanos as Mexican citizen is a colonized subject in relation to Spain, but she also is a member of the ruling elite who, after her parents' death, inherited tracts of land in Chiapas. In Sevilla, Castellanos sees an echo of Mexico's deepest colonial past from which she cannot maintain a distance because it affects her at her very core. She therefore does not approach Seville as a city with a glorious past but as a degraded place.

She describes the city as an “inmenso museo.” To compare the city to a museum indicates a quality of sterility, stasis. The same stasis she notes in the law students’ verbal expressions. Indeed, Castellanos fears she cannot talk rationally about the past or the feelings brought up by her experience of Sevilla and tells Guerra: “Bueno, me estoy haciendo bolas y no puedo explicarme. Pero el hecho es que me produjeron una impresión de aniquilamiento terrible” (*Cartas* 103). Castellanos’s inconsistency in describing Sevilla can also be seen when she first describes Sevilla as being like Mexico. If Castellanos had belonged to the mainstream discourse, she could potentially have identified with colonial history like the father, José María Rojas, in *Rito de iniciación* or the father/ landowner, César Argüello, in *Balún Canán* (1957). As a young woman looking for an alternate existence, this is not only not an option available to her but one she must vehemently reject.

2.9 The Departure

When on the ship to Spain, during her Madrid residency and while traveling through Europe, Castellanos maintained a (largely one-sided) correspondence with Guerra in Mexico. In this section, I explore what it means when she stops writing letters. With the ending of the courses at the University of Madrid, Castellanos’s and Castro’s visas are about to expire, and the women’s residence is closing for the summer. The two women move out of the women’s residence to a pension in Madrid where Coronel stayed. This pension is owned by a woman who physically and emotionally dominates the space. Castellanos writes of the summer heat, “un calor *crazy*” (158). She was waiting for a letter from Guerra on whether he received a scholarship to study in Paris. If, on the chance that he does receive the scholarship, she tells him that she will stay in Madrid until it is time for her to join him in France and Castro would return immediately to Mexico.

Castro has accompanied Castellanos on the entire trip: they have shared a room on the ship, at the women's residence, and when they travelled. If the case that Guerra does not receive the scholarship, the two women plan to travel together to Italy.

At the end of July 1951, Castellanos received a letter from Guerra saying he will not be coming to Europe, and she and Castro leave Madrid, first travelling to Barcelona by train. Castellanos sent her last letter from Madrid to Guerra, collected in *Cartas a Ricardo*, followed by five more letters from Naples and Rome. The last letter she sent from Europe is dated September 26, 1951, Vienna, Austria. In this letter, Castellanos, after telling Guerra that they have bought two return tickets on a boat leaving from Rotterdam, writes: "Ya le contaré todo a nuestra llegada" (*Cartas* 169). And she follows with a summary of their trip: "Nos han pasado miles de cosas. Hemos conocido gente muy suave y muy buena. Hemos pasado muchos aprietos, hemos visto muchas cosas y nos hemos convencido de que somos unas mensas y no sabemos nada" (169). As the arc of a narrative, the story has come to an end. The next letter in *Cartas a Ricardo*, dated December 15, 1951, is from Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas. Absent are any letters from the remainder of the two women's travels in Europe, their Atlantic crossing, their time in New York and the bus trip back to Mexico.

As this chapter is coming to a close, an important issue remains to be addressed. Indeed, before leaving Madrid, Castellanos sends her typewriter back to Mexico: "Ésta es, creo yo, la última carta que le escribo en mi máquina. Porque mañana vendrán por ella los hombres de la Agencia Cook y la enviarán a México, adonde llegará antes que yo" (*Cartas* 161). When she states that her typewriter will probably arrive before she does, she has divided her two selves with the typewriter representing one self. The grounds for shipping the typewriter to Mexico would be material ones—the difficulty of travelling around Europe with a manual typewriter—,

but when Castellanos relinquishes the typewriter, she relinquishes her writerly self. The narrative can only be created on the way out. The writing inspired by the departure is no longer sustainable; in other words, the creation of the “I” which the departure has permitted is no longer possible and the story ends.

Chapter 3: Creating the Self - Letters from the American Midwest (1966 - 1967)

3.1 Introduction

During the 1966-67 academic year, Castellanos, as a visiting professor,³⁰ taught at three American universities: in the fall semester, 1966, at the University of Wisconsin in Madison; in the winter semester, 1967, at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, and in the summer semester, 1967, at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Her letters from this time are published in *Cartas a Ricardo*.

In the fall of 1966, when Castellanos relocated from Mexico City to Madison, Wisconsin, her circumstances were very different from when she travelled to Europe some sixteen years earlier. When Castellanos, accompanied by Dolores Castro, departed for Europe in October 1950, she was twenty-four years old, and had been an orphan for two years and consequently liberated from her role as “a dutiful daughter.” On arriving in the U.S. in September 1966, she is forty-one years old, married and has a four-year-old son. In addition, she has published a significant body of work.³¹ Indeed, the change in her civil status and the birth of her son are reflected not only in her letters’ contents but in the increased hybridity of *Cartas a Ricardo* with not only letters and telegrams written by Castellanos to her husband, Ricardo Guerra Tejada, but letters written by Castellanos to her son Gabriel and, once Gabriel joins his mother in the U. S., Gabriel’s letters and telegrams to his father in Mexico City. After Gabriel and his nanny, Herlinda Bolaños, join Castellanos in Madison in November 1966, they all travel to New York City by car. Included in *Cartas a Ricardo* is the letter Castellanos wrote to Guerra from this trip

³⁰ In Castellanos’s Indiana University faculty file, she was appointed as “Instructor.” (Gallo, n305).

³¹ Among this work are her two novels: *Balún Canán* (1957), *Oficio de tinieblas* (1962), as well as two collections of short stories: *Ciudad Real* (1960), *Los convidados de agosto* (1964). She had also been writing a column for the Mexico City newspaper, *Excélsior*, since 1963.

to New York – Gabriel wrote to his father on the reverse side of the last page of this letter – as well as three letters that Gabriel wrote to his father.

In addition to her trip to New York City, during her first semester in Madison, Castellanos traveled to Chicago, accompanied by a student who had befriended her, Louise Popkin. She took several day trips, also by car. When she tells Guerra that she is going once again to “Lago del Diablo” [Devil’s Lake] she qualifies the excursion: “aquí parece que no hay muchos lugares de paseo” (*Cartas* 203). In January, Castellanos, Gabriel and Bolaños relocate to Bloomington, where Castellanos was contracted to teach for the winter semester starting February 6, 1967. In Bloomington, they stay at Tulip Tree, a large apartment building on the Indiana University campus. On June 11th, Castellanos, Bolaños, and Gabriel travel by train from Bloomington to Boulder, Colorado, transferring in Chicago. Castellanos teaches at the University of Colorado for the first summer session. And on July 21, they take a flight from Denver to Mexico City: “Así que ese día, que es viernes además, nos tendrás a tus ordenes en la región más transparente, como a las tres de la tarde” (*Cartas* 268).³²

In the fall of 1966, at the time Castellanos relocated to Madison, both she and Guerra were firmly established members of the intellectual class in Mexico City,³³ a class which rotated around the National University. During the sexenio of the Mexican president, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970), the cardiologist Dr. Ignacio Chávez, inexperienced insofar as being the leader of a gigantic public university, was appointed as rector. Chávez, in turn, appointed Castellanos as the director of Press and Information. In the spring of 1966, in an increasingly

³² I have retrieved this information from the letters themselves.

volatile situation – the military occupying the university city – after being held prisoner in the rectorate tower along with Castellanos and other faculty members, by what Poniatowska characterizes as “una runfla de estudiantes” (18),³⁴ Chávez found himself forced to resign and Castellanos resigned in solidarity with him.³⁵ The National University had afforded Castellanos a professional allegiance and, with the forced resignation of her mentor, she experienced a sense of betrayal.

Castellanos’s opportunity to teach in the U.S. speaks to the growing interest in Latin American writers and Latin American politics in the late 1960’s, a direct result of Cold War politics. Before the Cuban Revolution, few American universities had Latin American studies programs, but during the late 1960’s many universities received grants from foundations such as the Ford Foundation to hire Latin American writers for their burgeoning Latin American studies departments.³⁶ At the same time, some of these same writers were being refused U.S. visas due to their communist sympathies.

3.1.1 Madison, Wisconsin

Castellanos, newly arrived in Madison, Wisconsin, is at a low point. In many ways, she is a fish out of water: she not only has left her young son, her marriage, her country, and her intellectual circle, but also the upper middle-class life to which she was accustomed. She is a Mexican citizen in the U.S.; a Spanish speaker in a predominantly English culture; a cosmopolite in a

³⁴ When Castellanos was sequestered the 10th floor, students had set fire to the 6th floor.

³⁵ The student strikes began in the law school protesting recent changes in policy within the University, for instance, the increase of the number of days that professor taught.

³⁶ The year after Castellanos left, 1967 – 1968, the Latin American Studies Department at Indiana University received a five-million-dollar grant from the Ford Foundation.

small city; she is on foot in the land of cars; a mother without her child; a wife without her husband; a homeowner who is not home. Like the heroine of a classic tale, we meet her at the beginning of her journey. It is in Madison, Wisconsin, temporarily stripped of many of the markers of her identity, but others reinstated, principally a job, important to her sense of self,³⁷ where Castellanos can pick up her pen and write. From Madison, she begins the first line of her first letter home with a literary trope: “tomo no mi débil pluma sino mi débil mano para escribirles” (*Cartas* 183). As Deborah Kaplan argues in “Jane Austen’s Letters: Representing Two Cultures:” “Personal letters create their intimacy by voicing cultural identification shared by letter writer and reader” (212). In writing from a country where she feels herself to be in exile, Castellanos reaches out to her husband to solidify her cultural identity. Although she begins her first letter home: “Mi querido Ricardo” with the use of the plural form of you in “escribirles,” she addresses not only her collective family but her future readers.

3.1.2 Writing the Self in Exile

Castellanos’s letters record her efforts to create herself as a complete person, when she, like many women, has been defined by conflicting and overlapping roles as wife, mother, daughter. Furthermore, in the U. S., Mexican cultural stereotypes are applied to her, for instance when the faculty wives at the University of Wisconsin ask her for Mexican recipes. Here again, she can reach out to her husband, who she depends on to know that the kitchen and cooking have never been an area where she feels at home.³⁸ It is in writing letters, that Castellanos precipitates the

³⁷ “Hay una cosa muy importante. No sabes lo que significa para mí estar trabajando, me siento persona, formo parte de una comunidad, funciono” (*Cartas* 210).

³⁸ See Castellanos’s first letter home, dated September 13, 1966, Madison, Wisconsin: “Y anoche para que te caigas muerto, fui a una reunión de puras señoras norteamericanas.... todas muy amables, pidiéndome recetas de cocina de México, en las cuales sabes que soy una experta” (*Cartas* 183).

process of her intellectual growth and where she mourns her marriage. Susan Sontag in “Where the Stress Falls,” argues: “Poet’s prose not only has a particular fervor, density, velocity, fiber. It has a distinctive subject: the growth of the poet’s vocation. Poet’s prose is mostly about being a poet. And to write such autobiography, as to be a poet, requires a mythology of the self.”

Indeed, Erin Gallo in her essay, “The Political Becomes Personal: Rosario Castellanos and the U.S. Women’s Liberation Movement,”³⁹ speaks of “the evolutionary potential within the letters Castellanos sent from the U.S.” (311) and that “for [Castellanos], writing functions as the ultimate source of liberation” (299). If women’s autobiographical writing must come from a relational self, not from the masculine myth of inviolable self, Castellanos uses the epistolary form to reposition herself, “to reflect the vicissitudes of a female consciousness towards completeness through the act of writing” (Schlau 86).

In her letters, Castellanos uses a colloquial style; she inserts jokes, idiomatic expressions, exclamations, the metaphor of sickness, and cultural tropes. She plays on iconic literary works by Mexican male writers. For instance, in her first letter home she describes Madison’s geography, and references the opening of Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* (1955): “[I]a ciudad está sobre una serie de colinas y entonces son puras subidas y bajadas” (*Cartas* 183).⁴⁰ In her letters, she also provides details of her daily routine and explores the past, juxtaposing the past and the present, for instance she examines her relation to sexuality and writes of the jealousy that she felt

³⁹ Gallo’s essay is the only essay I know of which looks at Castellanos’s letters in *Cartas a Ricardo* from her year in the United States. As Gallo mentions, Cynthia Steele’s important essay on *Cartas a Ricardo*, “Letters from Rosario: Power, Gender and Canon Formation in Mexico,” focuses on the letters Castellanos wrote in the 1950’s and what they say about her rural childhood. (“The Political” 299)

⁴⁰ When, in *Pedro Páramo*, obeying his mother’s dying request, Juan Preciado travels to Comala in search of his father: “El camino subía y bajaba. *Sube o baja según se va o se viene. Para el que va, sube; para el que viene, baja*” (67-68; emphasis Rulfo’s).

as a child when either of her parents would turn their attention to another person. Although the conversational letter writing style is anti-academic, nonlinear and belongs to the world of women, the narrative arc of Castellanos's letters from the U.S., as Sontag posits of the poet's prose, "is devoted to chronicling the triumphant emergence of the poet."

I argue that by writing letters during her U.S. sojourn, Castellanos, in effect, was able to reposition herself not only as a wife and mother, but as a writer and professor. I demonstrate how she travelled from an initial position of dependence and submission to one of relative independence. Castellanos's time in the U. S. served as a kind of rebirth (not devoid of contradictions and tensions), one of "una serie de partos sucesivos" (*Cartas* 265) to which she refers to in a letter dated June 9, 1967, Bloomington, Indiana. Gallo argues that during Castellanos's time in the United States, she was determined to do three things: achieve independence from her husband; feel pride in singlehood and to be self-determined (297). These goals allowed for Castellanos to become a better mother. Indeed, in her letters Castellanos travels from an ambivalent relationship to her son – in his verbal precocity not so unlike his brilliant mother – to one where she enjoys his company: "Pero la plenitud, la felicidad es él" (*Cartas* 265). In a letter dated, October 3, 1966, after analyzing exactly how she needs to change, she states: "todo estoy me parece muy fácil, escrito. Pero ya vivido lo es menos" (*Cartas* 201). From Madison, Bloomington, and Boulder, by means of "lo escrito" in her determination to achieve emotional independence, it is her own self she examines as if she were both insect and scientist, for instance: "Todos mis esfuerzos se dirigen, primero, a desligar la causa de mi malestar con nada que esté fuera de mí, especialmente contigo. Así la agresividad tiene que desviarse, refluir hacia su propio origen o perderse sin tomar como blanco ningún objeto determinado" (*Cartas* 187).

In exile, Castellanos prefers to see Madison as a kind of bell jar and, on occasion, she makes disparaging comments about its colloquialism, the culture in the Spanish department and the academic level of her students. Indeed, in her letter of September 22, 1966, she calls her state of exile “un purgatorio:” “Trato de convencerme que éste es un purgatorio bastante agradable. Es cómodo, la gente es agradable, la ciudad bonita, las clases obligan a uno a estudiar, a releer, en suma, a hacer su vida intelectual” (*Cartas* 188). Moreover, in her isolation, she is reminded of her time as a tubercular patient in a sanatorium in San Ángel (*Cartas* 187). It is in this declared purgatory where she can take responsibility for her emotions. Indeed, Gallo argues that Castellanos appears insulated to important aspects of the University culture, such as the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam war protests (“The Political” 305). The University of Wisconsin was also headquarters of the newly minted NOW (National Association of Women) because Kathryn Clarenbach, one of the founders along with Betty Friedan, taught Political Science at the university (“The Political” 297). Because Castellanos’s journey to Madison is a personal one, it serves her to imagine the city as a kind of blank slate or, conversely, a blank page.

While Madison does not measure up to the level of sophistication of Mexico City, its provincialism, as Castellanos perceives it, provides her with a welcome respite. She is away from her husband, away from the gossip of her husband’s intellectual circle, away from her previous demanding and very public job at the UNAM, away from the responsibility of overseeing meals and running a household. Castellanos’s U.S. sojourn can be considered both a period of exile and, one of escape. As I addressed in my first chapter quoting Victoria Ocampo, this very dichotomy is inherent in the notion of travel: dislocation and discovery. In her “minúsculo”

university apartments, importantly, Castellanos has temporarily escaped the tyranny of motherhood and wifehood.⁴¹

It is important to point out that on reading Castellanos's letters, it is very difficult (and not advisable) to deduce her intentions, to know why she acts the way she does. I find this to be particularly true when Gabriel comes to join her. In her early letters from Madison, Castellanos classifies herself as sick, but can a sick woman travel to a foreign country and successfully teach three literature classes and attend plays and conferences? As an unreliable narrator, Castellanos lists the reasons for her decision to come to the U.S. These reasons circulate around each other and the woman providing them, essentially remains unknowable.

As one of her reasons to come to the U.S., Castellanos names the loss of her job. She claims that without a job her status in front of Gabriel was radically diminished. She refers to what she characterizes as her "su agresividad" y "mis últimos arrebatos" y "mis estallidos de violencia" y "mis ataques de furia," (*Cartas* 188) and her moods: "siniestro de malestar, de desequilibrio y casi, casi de locura" (*Cartas* 201). She reassures Guerra that in Madison, not only does she have a regular schedule with healthy habits – the implication being that this was not possible in Mexico – but she is losing weight: "Me organizo unos desayunos suculentos, camino todo el día y como hasta las seis de la tarde. Tomo leche sin cesar y vitamina A. Estoy bajando un poco de peso, lo que era necesario porque entre *chicharrón* y *chicharrón*, y *botanita* y *botanita* (ay), ya no era posible" (*Cartas* 184). Here, she presents herself as fitting into the gender norms for an ideal wife. She not only abstains from greasy foods but is gaining control

⁴¹ See letter dated October 3, 1966, Madison, Wisconsin: "Estoy descansando también de la casa, que fue una monserguita tanto tiempo. Aquí no me entra el telele que todo esté impecable. Si se me antoja arregla el departamento y si no le doy su manita de gato para que esté presentable" (*Cartas* 202).

over her moods, *su malestar*, something she also deemed herself incapable of doing while she was in Mexico. Castellanos positions her time in the U.S. as a cure that will be of benefit to both her and her husband and she enlists the letters themselves as evidence.⁴² By providing her justifications, she builds her case for the abandonment of Gabriel who she has left in Mexico. The final justification she provides, what she calls: “mi verdadero problema, al que me tengo que enfrentar sin paliativo y sin ningún pretexto: ¿soy o no soy una escritora? ¿Puedo escribir? ¿Qué?” (*Cartas* 186).

This fundamental question—¿Soy o no soy una escritora? —is perhaps a question that can never be definitively answered. As Schlau argues: “Castellanos views the expression of self through language, especially in its written form, as a practice of (detached) communication that may substitute for emotion and connection” (87). It is with this expression of self through language that Castellanos searches for wholeness. In the same vein, Molloy states about Ocampo that writing for her “es ejercicio de autoconfiguración y de autoconocimiento” (15). The search for the self can never come to an end, just as the expression of self can never come to an end. The definitions “woman” and “writer,” which Castellanos applies to herself, when juxtaposed, are inherently unstable ones.

⁴² “Pero guardas estas cartas, para que no se olvide lo que sé, para que yo no vuelva a entrar en esas confusiones...Yo tampoco confío en mí. Yo también me tengo miedo...Tenme paciencia, porque quiero crecer y no puedo, porque quiero convertirme en una mujer y no lo alcanzo, y me quedo en unos balbuceos horribles de niña, de monstruo” (*Cartas* 210).

3.2 Sickness

In Castellanos's early letters from Madison, she presents herself as sick; she references "mi enfermedad" (188) and speaks of a previous period of illness.⁴³ In her late twenties, Castellanos worked in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas, in what is known as "tierra caliente" for the Escuela de Ciencias y Artes del Estado organizing an arts program, a library, a film series, conferences, a magazine, a theatre group and a dance program. Here, she contracted tuberculosis, returned to Mexico City, and spent months under forced rest in a sanitarium. This period was followed by what she calls, in an article written as letters to Elías Nandino: "Complicación con otras enfermedades, problemas económicos, sentimentales. En fin dos años catastróficos" (*Mujer* 64). In her first letter from Madison Castellanos reports: "He tenido mis amagos de angustia, a horas fijas sin motivo, con una regularidad de oleaje. Pasan solos o me salgo a caminar por estas calles desconocidas como si yo tuviera un pneumotorax⁴⁴ y el pulmón en reposo" (*Cartas* 184). In the narration of her story, she associates her arrival in Madison with the feelings of isolation and fear she experienced in the sanitarium. From this isolated state, she writes: "Observo a la gente, sus relaciones, y cada vez me siento más distinta, como un ser de otro planeta. Quiero imitar la conducta que veo y espero, al fin de viaje, haber logrado – al menos – una imitación. Civilizarse no ha de ser imposible, creo" (*Cartas* 184).

⁴³ See her letter of September 22, 1966, from Madison, Wisconsin: "Y no creas, he tenido en esta estancia en Madison muchas vivencias que me recuerdan el tiempo internada en San Ángel. A veces, cuando la desesperación es muy fuerte, pienso que era preferible el sanatorio y que es excesivo pedirle a una gente tan enferma como yo que se comporte como si fuera normal. Pero luego pienso en que el sanatorio sería ya declarase completamente vencida, darse por muerta" (*Cartas* 187).

⁴⁴ A pneumotorax is a procedure for treating tuberculosis where the lung is deflated. From the context of her letter, it seems very possible that Castellanos received such a treatment when she was in a sanitarium for tuberculosis.

With the image of an alien coming to earth to learn from its denizens, Castellanos evokes Frankenstein's monster, who, over the course of a year, through the chink in a window observes the DeLacey family in an adjoining cottage. When Safie, Felix DeLacy's Turkish fiancée, reunites to the DeLacey family, Felix teaches her to speak French. Frankenstein's monster, observing from his hovel, learns language along with Safie. Castellanos's sense of disorientation is partially due to being in Madison, Wisconsin,⁴⁵ and it is in part due to language. Like Safie, in *Frankenstein*, Castellanos needs to learn a language that is not her native language. When she first arrives in Madison, Castellanos reads in English – she reports to Guerra that she is reading *An American Dream* by Norman Mailer, stories by J.D. Salinger and *Herzog* by Saul Bellow, none of which she particularly seems to enjoy – but it appears she struggled with spoken and aural fluency. Whatever her actual skills, what does stand out, according to her own narration, is that when she first arrived in the U.S., she found socializing in English to be exhausting.⁴⁶

3.2.1 Culture Shock

As I mentioned in my first chapter, the metropolis for Castellanos, in contrast with the cloying provincialism of her childhood controlled by the Catholic church, represents a place of relative anonymity; for many women it is not the metropolis that breeds alienation and depression, but marriage and family life. It is in Mexico City where the protagonist Cecilia Rojas, in

Castellanos's novel *Rito de iniciación* registers at the National University and realizes her

⁴⁵ In 1966, Mexico City's population was around eight million, whereas the population of Madison stood at approximately 150,000.⁴⁵ In 1966, when Castellanos was teaching at the University of Wisconsin the student population was approximately 35,000.⁴⁵

⁴⁶ See letter dated October 7, 1966, Madison, Wisconsin: "Amanecí muy deprimida, a pesar de que la noche anterior había sido muy agradable. En la invitación a cenar todos hablaron exclusivamente inglés y yo entendí bien, aunque todavía no me suelto hablando. Pero creo que el esfuerzo y la tensión me cansaron y luego me resentí" (*Cartas* 203). Castellanos's English undoubtedly improved over the year she was in the United States. In her later letters, when she was in Indiana and Colorado, she no longer complains to Guerra about her language skills.

vocation as a writer. It is in this sense, as Schlau argues “in *Rito de iniciación*, “the capital became a safe space in which to exercise independence of thinking and emotion, as well as sexuality” (88).

In the first letter from Madison, Castellanos complains of the late summer heat and the distances between her apartment and the university campus. She also presents herself as incompetent when navigating in the unknown and potentially dangerous environment of Madison. Nevertheless, on foot, she insists on going to the movie theatres in downtown Madison although she complains to her husband that she does not know what films are playing: “porque yo estoy aquí como en Babia; para comprar un periódico necesitaría caminar unas 15 cuadras y por lo tanto no lo compro” (*Cartas* 192). With this comment, she signifies that her usual urban markers are absent.

In her letter dated October 7, 1966, she reports:

Fui al cine a ver *La dolce vita*. Doblada al inglés. Siniestra. En primer lugar, ha envejecido y ha pasado de moda totalmente. Luego oyendo a Mastroianni hablar como Foster Dulles⁴⁷ no te conmueves en lo más mínimo... Los cines son el lugar más solitario de la ciudad. Nadie va.” (*Cartas* 204)

Castellanos seeks within the limited urbanity of Madison, at the movie theatres, an alternate space in an urban environment, a sense of what movies and the movie theatre can represent to women. Castellanos was a dedicated cinephile. In her letters, she describes the movies, at times to ridicule the cultural stereotypes, that she has seen on the S.S. Argentina, in Spain, in Madison,

⁴⁷ Foster Dulles – U.S. Secretary of State and Cold War Strategist under President Dwight Eisenhower (1953 – 1959).

in New York City, as well as back in Mexico. Here she expresses her disillusionment because the theatre, instead of being a place where all kinds of people congregate, is empty: “nadie va” (204). In addition, Mastroianni, an iconic Italian leading man (as an actor), who represents Latin culture, has lost his voice. Here, Castellanos, a Latin American woman in the U.S., uses subversive humor by making fun of the voice of an American statesman. She writes to her husband because they share the same cultural identification, as I mentioned earlier; and Guerra, as a member of Latin America’s cultural elite, could easily be expected to understand her anti-imperial barbs.⁴⁸ Indeed, in her first letter home, Castellanos compared the two cultures which she is now negotiating, her own and the American one, with a reference to a Spanish idiomatic expression: “los norteamericanos la alquilan a uno para hacer piernas (no para enseñarlas) o para sudar el quilo como dicen los españoles” (*Cartas* 183). When she says the U.S. pays you to work your legs, not to show them, she shows an awareness of herself as an employee in the American capitalist system and, as with her disappointment over Mastroianni’s dubbed voice, she aligns herself with Latin culture.⁴⁹

Indeed, work, U.S. materialism, and money are predominant themes in Castellanos’s letters from Madison, and it is, in a large part through money that she negotiates her relationship with Guerra.⁵⁰ Although Castellanos makes fun of some of her colleagues who disparage the U.S., she also inevitably criticizes the U.S. Nonetheless, on a strictly personal level, she sees its

⁴⁸ All three of Guerra’s wives, including Castellanos, were talented women who held professional careers.

⁴⁹ The previous academic year, Maria del Carmen Millán had been a visiting professor in the same institutions where Castellanos taught. Millán had been contracted for the 1966-67 academic year, but at the last minute she could not go, and she offered for Castellanos to go in her place.

⁵⁰ See for instance in this letter dated October 11, 1966, Madison, Wisconsin, where Castellanos reports to Guerra: “Por fin te envío, con esta carta, el cheque por quinientos dólares. Deposítalo en tu cuenta, para que te seas menos difícil cobrarlo y úsalo como te convenga más, Yo me quedo con la otra mitad y espero que eso me baste y me sobre” (*Cartas* 208)

benefits. For one, she has a job that she takes seriously and that allows her as she says: “a hacer su vida intelectual” (188). The structure that a teaching position provides for her, as I have mentioned previously, she considers a necessary ingredient in her fight to feel like an adult person.

3.3 The Monster and Motherhood

Mary Shelley’s epistolary novel *Frankenstein* tells the story of Victor Frankenstein who creates a monster who he rejects upon its birth. Barbara Johnson in her essay on Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, “My Monster/My Self” posits that Frankenstein represents a form of Mary Shelley’s autobiography and that Frankenstein’s rejection of his creation speaks to Shelley’s own ambivalence not only towards motherhood but to her own writing. Johnson’s seminal essay begins: “To judge from recent traditions in scholarly as well as popular literature, three crucial questions can be seen to stand at the forefront of today’s preoccupations: the question of mothering, the question of the woman writer, and the question of autobiography” (15). These three questions are all central to Castellanos’s text.

The question of mothering comes up in what Poniatowska calls: “[Castellanos’s] ambiguous relation to her son, Gabriel” (*Cartas* 22). Early in her stay, in a letter dated September 29th, 1966, Castellanos writes: “Como te decía anoche por teléfono, me he sentido bastante mejor. Me he calmado un poco, me angustio menos, duermo más. Y por dentro, he admitido completamente que Gabrielito es alguien a quien no le guardo el menor resentimiento. Contigo las cosas van más lentas” (*Cartas* 197). When Castellanos first arrives in the U.S., she claims that Gabriel is better off with her, “[q]ué si yo estuviera tuberculosa también me habría

aislado para no contagiarlo” (188). But, importantly, by the end of her stay, her relationship with Gabriel improves.

Nevertheless, freshly arrived in Madison, a mother without her child, Castellanos does not conform to the female ideal: “El espolonazo fuerte lo recibo cuando recuerdo a Gabriel, porque además entra mi complejo de culpa por haberlo abandonado, complejo que se acrecienta cuando veo *las caras de asombro, de horror*, de quienes conocen su existencia y su edad” (*Cartas* 188 emphasis added). Castellanos raises what Johnson calls: “the monstrousness of selfhood, imbedded in the question of female autobiography” (190). This image, experiencing the self as an object of horror, is a variation of the image of an insect being looked at under a microscope of which I spoke in the first chapter. Because Gabriel is Castellanos’s child, he is an essential part of her and without him she is considered freakish. In what she calls her purgatory, in which she is determined to examine her own self, she looks in the mirror and a monstrous image is reflected there.

Imbedded in the idea of monstrousness of the female body are the concepts of procreation and death. Of her history of pregnancies leading up to the birth of Gabriel, in a letter dated October 13, 1966, she writes: “Que estoy en una situación anormal. Pero si lo pienso bien no he tenido una situación normal nunca. *Primero los embarazos y sus secuelas de abortos, de partos prematuros, de hormonas*, de difícil relación contigo” (*Cartas* 209; emphasis added). In this overwrought description it is her very body that is monstrous, the locus of creation and death.⁵¹ In addition, as I mentioned earlier, the faculty wives apply cultural stereotypes to Castellanos

⁵¹ I do not know with any exactitude the history of Castellanos’s pregnancies. In my third chapter, I quote from an *Excelsior* article, when she says she had two girls, who both died. See page 312 in *Mujer de palabras* vol. III

when they expect her to know Mexican recipes. Indeed, she moves uneasily among her gender, not fitting into strict categories.

In the epilogue to *Cartas a Ricardo* Poniatowska writes: *No cuesta trabajo adivinar lo que sucede dentro de la casa de Constituyentes, A veces visualizamos una película de suspenso; otras, una de terror.* (*Cartas* 17 emphasis added). In this horror movie, Poniatowska assigns Castellanos the role of the monster: “[Castellanos] se piensa fea, gorda, fodonga, histérica. Con toda razón, él busca en otras lo que no se encuentra en ella” (*Cartas* 17). Guerra’s behavior, on the other hand, is logical, “con toda razón” whereas Castellanos’s is irrational. Castellanos in her letter of April 9, 1967 from Bloomington, when referring to Guerra’s relation to his lover Selma: “...como tú has sido el pedagogo de la familia y yo la mujer de los complejos, pues *sigamos el juego*” (*Cartas* 239; emphasis added), likewise she assigns herself the role of the irrational woman. She implies both her and Guerra remain stuck in their roles with the man as the voice of reason and the woman the source of emotions. Indeed, Castellanos has been exploring the theme of women’s and men’s place in culture in her writing going back to her graduate thesis, *Sobre cultura femenina*.⁵²

3.4 Narrative Authority and Gabriel

Gilda Luongo Morales writes of “la escena de abandono de la infancia,” of Castellanos’s childhood.⁵³ The theme of abandonment comes into play because, in coming to the U.S.,

⁵² In her thesis, *Sobre cultura femenina*, Castellanos argued that ‘culture’ and ‘female’ are oxymoronic not because women lacked intellect and artistic capacities but because men had historically excluded them from being intellectual contributors” (“The Political” 298).

⁵³ See quote on page 25 from my first chapter where Castellanos talks about her childhood abandonment, most notably after the death of her younger brother.

Castellanos temporarily abandoned her son. Gabriel, accompanied by his nanny Bolaños, who Gabriel calls “mi Ina,” arrived in Chicago on December 2, 1966, some three months after Castellanos had left Mexico. During Christmas break, Castellanos, Bolaños, Gabriel and Louise Popkin, Castellanos’s student, and friend, with Popkin driving, travel in a Volkswagen to New York City. In her first months in Wisconsin Castellanos wrote of disturbed sleep and nightmares, but the car trip to New York she describes as an actual living nightmare with a very angry child:

Gabriel aprovecha la anormalidad de la situación para organizar unos berrinches espeluznantes, para agredir con una brutalidad de palabra y obra y para dar rienda suelta a sus obsesiones que ahora son la muerte y el suicidio. No le compres un juguete, amenaza al canto, revolcarse en el suelo, gritar que va a tirarse por la ventana, etc. (*Cartas* 229)

When Castellanos, Bolaños, and Gabriel are established at Tulip Tree, a large residence at Indiana University, in a letter to Guerra she likens Gabriel to a stick of dynamite with the fuse lit and blames Guerra for sending him to her, without any warning (*Cartas* 243). Gabriel is not the only one who displays dramatic behavior on the trip to New York. The theme of violence runs throughout Castellanos’ letters from this time. Castellanos presents her state of dislocation as a violent rupture, of uprootedness from what she calls, in her dramatic letter from New York City, her sustenance: “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...*” (*Cartas* 230 emphasis mine). Both mother and son battle to get attention from Guerra, and Gabriel, like his mother, is a fantastic teller of tales. And, as a true teller of tales, he gathers his information from the sources that are available to him. He, like Castellanos, observes the people around him. For instance, Castellanos reports to Guerra that Gabriel once he has

started attending preschool: “Como te he dicho trata de escuchar todo lo que puede, acecha hasta el grado de que en la escuela le dijeron *peeping*, mirón” (*Cartas* 248). It is interesting to note that in the first few months Castellanos was in the U.S. Gabriel, with the help of his stepbrother, Ricky, dictated letters to his mother. Just as Castellanos is invested in written communication to establish alliances, so is Gabriel.⁵⁴ Favret says of Frankenstein’s monster, “the monster invades his master’s narrative” (179). Likewise, Gabriel literally inserts himself into Castellanos’s narrative as his first letter to his father is written on the back side of Castellanos’s letter.⁵⁵ On the back of Castellanos’s letter from New York City in which she complains: “de que he sido definitivamente mutilada de lo que era mi sustento...” and in which she outlines Gabriel’s temper tantrums, Gabriel writes to his father his own version of the trip to New York City which includes his visit to the Museum of Natural History. He ends this letter: “me porto muy bien” (*Cartas* 230). Like the creator, Frankenstein, Castellanos’s voice is cultured whereas Gabriel’s voice is that of a child.

Gabriel’s letters, like his mother’s, are replete with details of his daily life which lend his letters an authority. For instance, in Gabriel’s first letter to his father from Bloomington, he tells him what he eats for breakfast: “Tomo un huevo revuelto o estrellado y un vaso de leche con sabor de chocolate o blanca. A veces mi Ina insiste que como un plátano” (*Cartas* 237).

⁵⁴ Presently Gabriel Guerra Castellanos is a journalist and political commentator in Mexico City. He has also served diplomatic positions in Canada and Germany.

⁵⁵ See editor’s note: “[En la cuarta cara, mayúsculas de Gabriel] (*Cartas* 230)”. It is possible that Castellanos and Gabriel collaborated on this letter, as would be appropriate for Gabriel’s age. That is to say that Castellanos told him which letters he needed as he dictated his letter and then he formed the letters. It is to be noted that by the end of his stay in the United States, Castellanos tells Guerra that Gabriel no longer needs to dictate his letters because he is able to write. Before Gabriel came to the United States, Castellanos mentions a letter she has received from Gabriel that he dictated to his older brother, Ricky. In a letter dated May 14, 1967, Castellanos, talking about Gabriel, reports: “De pronto un día, no sé si ya te lo conté, se suelta leyendo. Le cuesta trabajo, pero ya lo puede hacer; liga las sílabas, divide bien las palabras” (*Cartas* 255). Gabriel, in his seven months in the United States, thus learns to read, to write and to speak English.

Gabriel's letter is reminiscent of Castellanos's first letter home when she wrote her husband about "sus desayunos succulentos." Importantly, in this same letter, Gabriel sends his greetings to Selma, Guerra's lover: "Te mando muchos besitos y a mis hermanos y a Selma" (*Cartas* 237). In Gabriel's next letter, he also sends his wishes to Selma.⁵⁶ While Castellanos has been in the U.S., Gabriel has had access to Selma and his stepbrothers have explained to him their father's relation to Selma. With the open acknowledgement of Selma and her place in Guerra's life, Castellanos sees herself obligated to negotiate her return to Mexico, while taking into account Selma's existence. One of Gabriel's stories is that Selma is now his mother, while Castellanos has been cast out of the house.⁵⁷ In her letters from this time, Castellanos tells Guerra that, on different occasions, she has had to put Gabriel in the closet (as punishment). Indeed, she wrests control of the narrative from Gabriel. Although it is her story to tell, nevertheless, his voice forms a counterpoint to her narrative. When she puts him in the closet, she temporarily locks up his story which speaks of the presence of Selma in their life.⁵⁸

Castellanos reports to Guerra that she is not affected by Gabriel when he says that he does not love because she very likely doubts the veracity of this statement, but when he says that she does not love him, she enters a space where she loses her bearings. In this place reside the conflicted emotions she experiences as a mother, as Johnson has written in "the *role* of the mother [that] touches on primitive terrors of the mother's rejection of the child" (21 original

⁵⁶ Guerra and Selma Castillo Beraud had a daughter María. (I do not know her dates or full name.)

⁵⁷"Cuando molestaban a sus hermanos y le pegaban y él los amenazaba a dar la queja le decían que él no tenía mamá que le valiera. Que a mí habían echado y que no podía volver porque tú y Selma estaban casados, porque la casa era exclusivamente de ustedes y porque yo no había sido nunca más que una criada" (*Cartas* 245). When Ricardo Guerra married Rosario Castellanos, she replaced Lilia Carrillo, Ricky, and Pablo's mother, as Ricardo Guerra's wife just as Selma, in Castellanos's absence replaces her.

⁵⁸ "...le dije que si volvía a mencionar ese asunto [his father's relationship with Selma] iba yo a darles unas buenas nalgadas y a encerrarlo en el clóset" (*Cartas* 245).

emphasis). The mother's rejection of the child is not acceptable and needs to be repressed, thus dividing the self.

3.5 Castellanos and Herlinda Bolaños

[T]he woman writer attempts to bring together the spheres of 'home' and 'world.'- (qtd. in Favret 120).

In her letters, Castellanos writes details of her shared domestic life with Gabriel and Bolaños. For instance, in a letter dated May 30, 1967, she reports that she received flowers and records for her birthday, and was invited to dinner: “y, para cerrar con broche de oro fecha tan señalada, tuvimos una alarma de incendio a media noche que nos permitió a los habitantes de Tulip Tree salir a lucir nuestros últimos modelitos de pijamas y batas” (*Cartas* 261). She uses humor to describe the fire alarm, and, in addition, she presents an image of domestic intimacy among the denizens of the university housing, out at night in their pajamas. At times, as Gallo argues, Castellanos speaks highly of Bolaños, “el único ser cuerdo en esta casa” (*Cartas* 237), but at times, Castellanos represents Bolaños as hysterical. Bolaños assumes, to some degree, the role of Dolores Castro in Castellanos's letters from Spain. On occasion, Castellanos contrasted herself with Castro by asserting that she was more loyal than Castro as both a friend and as a romantic partner. Meanwhile, in Bloomington, Castellanos portrays herself as more dependable than Bolaños.

In her relationship with Guerra, as I mentioned earlier, Castellanos speaks of their respective roles where she plays the emotional role and Guerra plays the voice of reason. In her relationship with Bolaños, she, in part, takes on the traditional masculine role, with Bolaños playing the traditional emotional feminine role, according to normative conventions. While in

Indiana, in her letter dated, May 14, 1967, Castellanos relates how one day, she comes home to find Bolaños “alteradísima” (254). When Bolaños had gone down to get him to take Gabriel to his preschool, she couldn’t find him because Gabriel, along with another boy from the building, had left the building playground. In her letter, Castellanos says of Bolaños: “Herlinda seguía frenética y entró en una especie de estado sonambúlico (sic) que yo no sé hasta qué punto era verdadero o fingido pero que me dejó caer la casa encima porque no ataba ni desataba. Y además estaba tan enojada con Gabriel que no quería ni verlo” (*Cartas* 254).

In her first letter from Indiana, after returning from their trip to New York, Castellanos reported to Guerra that in New York, “Herlinda agotó la existencia de fajas y brassieres y batitas, por lo que sospecho que a su regreso se va a convertir la cortesana de Anáhuac” (*Cartas* 232). When Castellanos describes Bolaños reaction to Gabriel’s disappearance and her shopping excursions, Castellanos presents herself as the logical one. She earns a salary outside the home while Bolaños looks after her child. In the meantime, Bolaños shops for frivolous feminine undergarments and has hysterical attacks. When Castellanos has needed to buy things for herself, she emphasizes, they have been practical items, like a winter coat and new shoes.⁵⁹ While she presents her shopping outings as restrained and careful, Bolaños’s appear orgiastic. When Bolaños becomes sick, Castellanos medicates her with her own Valium supply. “Herlinda me dijo que no podía soportar más y eso más y estaba alteradísima. Yo la calmé, le di uno de mis valiosísimos Valium y me puse a conferenciar con Gabriel” (*Cartas* 254). Bolaños as the sick one now directs her anger at Gabriel, the child, as Castellanos the sick one at the time of her

⁵⁹ “Descubrí otras tiendas, otras cosas, y me compré al menos, zapatos que era lo que más me hacía falta. *Con calma voy a ir haciéndome de cosas bonitas y útiles*” (*Cartas* 208; emphasis added).

arrival in the United States, speaks of her resentment to Gabriel. Importantly, when Bolaños is sick, Castellanos, despite the state she finds herself in when Bolaños does not fulfill her duties, tells Guerra that she made a choice not to take Valium, acknowledging that at this time she cannot be the one who relies on medication: “Me sentía yo en carne viva ... no quería tomar ningún calmante porque si nos dormimos todos en la casa qué va a suceder” (*Cartas* 257). Indeed, in this unusual pair, Castellanos portrays herself as not only mentally but also physically strong, “cargada como una bestia,” able to carry on both the masculine role of teaching and the feminine roles, the ones she had previously either relegated entirely to or shared with Bolaños, of going to the supermarket and playing with Gabriel. Indeed, the language she chooses to describe her interaction with Gabriel: “me encierro a conferenciar con Gabriel,” (*Cartas* 254) with the use of “conferenciar” signifies detachment and intellect over emotion thus further distinguishing herself from the hysterical Bolaños. The transference of roles from Castellanos to Bolaños indicates that their assigned roles are not permanent but in flux. Nevertheless, where both women do coincide, is in their intense ambivalence about returning to Mexico.⁶⁰

3.6 Bloomington, Indiana

It is interesting to note that Castellanos’s letters are novelistic. The dramatic quality of her letters and her journalism, make them more readable. In her letters, other voices speak, not only her own, voices like Gabriel’s child voice. During the first semester, while at the University of Wisconsin, the subject of Castellanos’s letters is often herself, as well as the people in the

⁶⁰ In a letter dated May 30, 1967, Castellanos tells Guerra how Bolaños, Gabriel and herself, all have their own reasons for wanting to go to Boulder, Colorado for the summer session. Of Bolaños’s reasons, Castellanos states, “...y Herlinda porque le saca a la regresada y a enfrentarse de nuevo con una vida que no tiene mucho de atractiva” (*Cartas* 264).

Spanish department – the other faculty members⁶¹ and students – but when Gabriel and Bolaños arrive, she does not write to Guerra about her courses or the professors but about Gabriel and Gabriel’s relationships with the children in Tulip Tree. The setting of her letters from Bloomington is primarily domestic, most often the setting is her apartment. The names that populate these letters, Kathy, Randy, Beatriz, and José Luis, are all Tulip Tree residents and Gabriel’s friends. In her letters from this time, she often mentions the building playground visible from her apartment because this is where Gabriel plays with his friends. In her journalism from her last year in Tel Aviv, the setting is most often the Mexican Embassy. Raising children takes place to a large degree in the domestic/private space. By writing about Gabriel and introducing his voice in a letter that will eventually be published, Castellanos takes a domestic issue, motherhood, and makes it public. As I mention in my third chapter, Gabriel’s voice is often heard in Castellanos’s *Excelsior* articles, especially in the ones from her last year. Indeed, Gabriel’s written words, his signature on the back of a postcard, are the concluding words in her posthumously published last article from Israel.

In Bloomington, as I learned from Gallo’s essay, Castellanos was the only woman Latin American professor in the Spanish department. Her colleagues were Latin American writers such as José Donoso, Homero Ardijs, Sergio Galindo and Juan José Arreola. (306). Gallo interviewed two of Castellanos’s former students from this time, Castellanos’s friend in Madison, Popkin, who attended Castellanos’s classes as an auditor, and Eduardo González, a student of Castellanos’s in Indiana. In Gallo’s interview, Popkin talks about Castellanos’s depression, the

⁶¹ See Gallo’s essay for Castellanos’s observations on the women professors at the University of Wisconsin where Gallo speaks of how the independence of several women faculty members serves as a role for Castellanos. Louise Popkin, who is a single and independent from her family, also serves a model for Castellanos.

negative effect that her husband had on her, and that Gabriel and his friends were often running around “making sustained adult conversation difficult” (303). Popkin’s description of Castellanos as related by Gallo, fits in the gendered division where the female space is a private one. She does not describe Castellanos in the classroom. Meanwhile, González focuses on the public woman by addressing Castellanos’s classroom performance. He also signals an occasion she openly disagreed with José Donoso on his evaluation of D.H. Lawrence. As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, in her letters from this time Castellanos does not mention Donoso or her classroom performance but instead she focuses on Gabriel and she privileges his voice. In her Ph.D. dissertation on Castellanos, Gallo mentions that Deborah Cohn, who has written of Latin American intellectuals in the U.S., did not know that Castellanos had taught in American universities (14). This speaks to the ways in which, during Castellanos’s time in the U. S., the private space is eclipsed by the public space, which is further evidenced in the way the two ex-students that Gallo interviewed participate in gendered specific ways in their description of Castellanos.

3.7 The Return Home

Home is rarely a safe haven for a woman who has wandered. Once she steps outside the domestic sphere, the worldly woman cannot, like Rousseau in *The Solitary Wanderer* or Wordsworth in *Home at Grassmere*, simply return home. – (qtd in Favret 120)

Castellanos, in her letters written from the U.S.—specifically, from Boulder, Colorado—looks towards creating a place for herself when she arrives back in Mexico. Indeed, ever since arriving in the U.S., she has been trying to figure out how she could go back to Mexico. Nevertheless, it

is with a sense of trepidation: “ese retorno que deseo mucho, casi tanto como lo temo” (*Cartas* 257). As Favret posits, for a woman who has left the home, the return is never a simple matter. Indeed, Castellanos, throughout her letters, proposes many solutions to how she and Guerra will structure their lives based on the assumption that they stay married.

In her last letter from the U.S., where she focuses on the logistics of her impending return, she tells Guerra that two of her students from Bloomington will be taking four boxes of her books back to Mexico. Speaking of these boxes, she requests: “yo preferiría que no lo abrieras antes de que yo llegara porque los quiero ordenar más o menos en su lugar definitivo” (*Cartas* 261). In contrast to her books, Castellanos, unsure of her own physical place inside the house, feels compelled to ask her husband: “Yo como voy a lo concreto sino a lo nimio, voy a hacerte una pregunta: ¿ya has pensado cómo alojarnos?” (*Cartas* 270). Of Bolaños, Castellanos reminds her husband: “Siempre ha sido inasimilable al resto de la servidumbre. ¿Dónde dormiría y pondría sus cosas?” (*Cartas* 270) Indeed, Bolaños, like Castellanos herself, once back in Mexico, cannot be easily assimilated. Of herself and Gabriel, Castellanos writes: “En cuanto a mí, podría hacerlo con Gabriel a quien hay que desacostumbrar, poco a poco, a esta vecindad que nos han impuesto las casas en que hemos estado aquí” (*Cartas* 270).

In fact, all three of them lack the capacity, once back in Mexico, to be easily assimilated. During their U.S. sojourn, they have been allowed to not only reconfigure their own identity, but their identity inside the traditional family. Castellanos has supported herself, Gabriel and Bolaños.⁶² She prepares her petitions to Guerra by writing: “ya no voy con ánimos ni de discutir

⁶² Castellanos says of her determination to teach at the summer session at the University of Colorado, despite uncertainties due to her visa status: “yo porque me había hecho ilusiones y cálculos (aunque la amolada en cuestión de trabajo no va a ser poco)” (*Cartas* 263).

ni siquiera de dialogar” (268). She feels most effective through writing and wishes that Guerra would correspond by writing; indeed, she tells him to prepare “tus pliegos y tus laudos” (*Cartas* 270). While in the U.S. she had the economic authority. She has been successfully negotiating with Bolaños the care of Gabriel and of the apartment. She was the one who told Bolaños when she would need her to look after Gabriel so that she could teach, attend a lecture, or socialize, and in this way, has been assuming the traditional masculine role. Once she returns to Mexico, she acknowledges that this role will revert to her husband. She makes a list of proposed schedules as far as shared responsibilities regarding the house and the care of Gabriel and Guerra’s two sons, Ricky and Pablo, “acerca de las bases de nuestra coexistencia” (*Cartas* 268). She transfers to him the role she has played in the U.S.: “a) en el aspecto económico. Que tu señalaras, con una cifra que tomara en cuenta la equidad y la proporción con mis ingresos, mi colaboración al mantenimiento de la familia” (*Cartas* 268).

In her letters from Bloomington, she does not seem to need him anymore. She suffers a setback when Gabriel first joins her in the U.S. Indeed, there was an intense period over several months of adjustment. Nevertheless, as her date of return grows closer, she understandably waivers in her newfound confidence. Also, in this last letter, she asks that Guerra prepare a petition to correspond to hers.

3. 8 Conclusion

Ya no quiero sentirme culpable ni víctima ni nada sino libre y adulta y responsable como me he sentido aquí. – (qtd. in *Cartas* 266).

In summary, Castellanos's letters from the U.S. to her husband, Ricardo Guerra Tejada, in Mexico, like her letters from Spain, are a combination of travel diary, autobiographical memoir, and epistolary novel. Among the things she chronicles are the cultural life of the universities where she works, her changing moods, her classes, her dreams and – once her son and his nanny arrive – her son's daily life as well as her renegotiation of her maternal role. By coming to the U.S., Castellanos ultimately seeks to redefine herself and the roles she plays. In summary of all that has been discussed in this chapter, Castellanos's early days in Madison evoke memories of the times she spent as tuberculosis patient in a sanitarium when she was in her mid-twenties. On her arrival in the U.S., she presents herself as someone who is not well enough to live with her family, and this includes Gabriel, who was four years old at the time. Being able to work once again provides a sense of purpose for which she is grateful. But once Gabriel and Bolaños join her in the U.S., she appears to completely abandon any project for self-improvement and instead to focus her attention on Gabriel. With the arrival of her son and his nanny, Herlinda Bolaños, the three characters form a reconfigured family for the rest of their stay in the U.S. Castellanos becomes not only a professional success, her employers offer her a position for the following academic year,⁶³ but a “good” mother: “libre y adulta y responsable” (*Cartas* 266). As readers, we have been privy to her personal development constructed with intimate letters, containing myriad details of daily life, which allow her to create herself as a literary character. The narrative of her personal journey from sickness to health, is one which we can follow. Nonetheless, because the return is an inevitable part of the journey, she is heavily invested in constructing a

⁶³ See the letter dated May 14, 1967, from Bloomington, Indiana: “Pero ya me quité definitivamente hablándole a Dowling acerca de su proposición de un año más aquí y contestándole que mi asunto (que mi boca sea de un ángel) estaba resuelto y que no tendría permiso (porque insistía, lo que me halaga) hasta el año sabático” (*Cartas* 257).

plausible structure for the pending reunion with her husband. Nevertheless, the failure of her marriage appears inevitable.

In my third chapter, by a close reading of Castellanos's *Excelsior* articles written when she served as the Mexican ambassador to Israel, I explore how, through the many of the same literary techniques she uses in her letters, importantly, the epistolary form and a plurality of voices, she exploits the difference between private space – typically gendered as female – and public space, traditionally gendered as masculine.

Chapter 4: Performing Intimacy: Epistolary in *Excélsior's* Tel Aviv Journalism (April 3, 1971 - August 26, 1974)

Estrujando el papel entre las manos Cecilia deseó ser él y partir, lejos, lejos a cualquier parte y no regresar nunca. – (qtd in *Rito de iniciación* 312).

4.1 Introduction

Castellanos was nominated Mexican ambassador to Israel in 1971 during the presidency of Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976). Emilio Rabasa, the secretary of Foreign Affairs at the time of her nomination, states that Castellanos agreed to accept the position in Israel under the following three conditions: 1) that Rabasa help her with her divorce from her husband Ricardo Guerra and make sure that she could take her son Gabriel with her to Israel; 2) that she be allowed to continue to write her weekly column in *Excélsior*; 3) that she could teach literature in a university in Israel (*Recuerdo, Recordemos*, 67). These demands would have allowed her to maintain her identity as a mother, a journalist,⁶⁴ and teacher separate from her position as a representative of the state.⁶⁵

In the three and half years Castellanos served as Mexican ambassador in Israel, she published at least 96 articles in *Excélsior*, the Mexico City newspaper with the largest circulation

⁶⁴ Ironically, as Mexican ambassador, Castellanos was not allowed to be a dramatist. Her play *El Eterno Femenino* which she wrote while in Israel, commissioned by Emma Teresa Armendáriz (1926-1997) on the basis of her *Excélsior* columns was not produced until after her death because Secretary of State Rabasa deemed its positions incompatible with those of the state. Steele, Cynthia, "Letters from Rosario: On Power, Gender and Canon Formation in Mexico." (1996)

⁶⁵ Vivian Schelling in "Popular Culture in Latin America," argues that during the 60's and 70's populist governments in Latin America, particularly Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina, tried to legitimize their governments by "addressing the new working and middle classes in an almost Messianic way as 'the People-Nation' whose vocation it was to create the modern, developed nation" (184). Castellanos' identity as a Mexican woman, mother and literature professor feminizes the state to convey the message on an international level that Mexico is becoming more modern.

and the official voice of the PRI, the ruling governmental party, where Julio García Scherer served as editorial page editor.⁶⁶ Before being invited to write for the editorial pages at *Excélsior*, Castellanos had written for several other publications including *Rehilete*, a feminist journal based in Mexico City edited by Carmen Rosenzweig, and women's magazines, what are called "las femeninas." Castellanos continued to write for *Excélsior* until the early fall of 1966 when she went to teach in the U.S. for the academic year. Scherer invited her back as an editorial page writer in the fall of 1967.⁶⁷ She then continued to write for *Excélsior* until her death in August 1974.

In 1968, Scherer became the newspaper's editor, a post he held until 1976.⁶⁸ It is said he ruled over the paper like a dictator and that during his reign journalists were allowed to write articles of unprecedented length and freedom (Villoro 65).⁶⁹ A statement that illustrates Scherer's power to protect his journalists from government censorship, while imposing his own will. The period during which Castellanos served as Mexican ambassador to Israel coincided with Scherer's position as editor of *Excélsior*. Therefore, notwithstanding the constraints

⁶⁶ Castellanos's first published article with *Excélsior* is dated June 22, 1963, entitled "De un género ínfimo: el intercambio sentimental" (195).

⁶⁷ In October 1967, after returning from the U.S., Castellanos won a prestigious Mexican literary award for her first novel *Balún Canán*. At this time, Scherer invited her to return to the paper. Castellanos was teaching comparative literature at the UNAM. She writes in one of her first letters to Guerra, in the fall of 1967, that she is keeping a very low profile. By becoming a weekly columnist, she positions herself as what we would now call a public intellectual. In a letter to Guerra dated October 12, 1967, Castellanos, describes that moment she won el Trouyet prize: "momento psicológico en que yo estaba convertida en una absoluta *yes woman*. Dije que sí a toda clase de entrevistas para periódicos y revistas, acepté (como ya te decía) volver a colaborar en *Excélsior*, hablé en "La hora nacional", fui al programa de Zabludowsky, etc. Ahora estoy de lo mas arrepentida de todo, incluso de lo de Chile, pero ni modo" (*Cartas* 304).

⁶⁸ In a bust-up, Scherer was fired in 1976. Many of *Excélsior's* journalists, former colleagues of Castellanos's, for instance José Emilio Pacheco, lost their jobs. Scherer went on to found the left leaning Mexican political journal, *Proceso*.

⁶⁹ Notwithstanding Villoro's claim, Castellanos's *Excélsior* articles always wrote her articles a standard length of four typed cuartillas.

imposed upon Castellanos as a representative of the Mexican state in Israel, her articles in *Excélsior* were published under conditions perhaps unprecedented in journalism in Mexico.

Castellanos's journalism cannot be strictly categorized as chronicle. Her articles do not necessarily take place in real time although she often incorporates chronicle.⁷⁰ For the purposes of this chapter, I call her pieces that first appeared in *Excélsior* articles because she wrote them to be published in the daily newspaper. Importantly, Andrea Reyes calls these same pieces "artículos" as in "artículos rescatados." The renaming of Castellanos's articles as essays speaks to an editor's influence. Critics such as Maureen Ahearn categorize Castellanos's articles as essays: "First written as weekly pieces for *Excélsior* and other newspapers in Mexico City, they constitute a fascinating mosaic of cultural life and thought in Mexico between 1960 and 1974" (*A Rosario Castellanos Reader* 39). Where Ahearn, Schaeffer and Reyes do concur, however, is that Castellanos's essays "are her most neglected genre in terms of translation and criticism" (*A Rosario Castellanos Reader* 39).

Gelpi posits that the Latin American's essay's literary, cultural, and ideological complexity has often been ignored or even denied (201). As an exception, Reyes, brought her attention to Castellanos's journalism by examining the microfilm records of *Excélsior* in the UCLA library and, by visiting *Excélsior* offices in Mexico City. Reyes edited and arranged Castellanos's articles in chronological order as well as writing introductory essays. This work has been published as: *Mujer de palabras: Artículos rescatados de Rosario Castellanos* (2004, 2005 and 2007). *Mujer de palabras* volume III, which I will be looking at in this chapter,

⁷⁰ Ahearn compares Castellanos's articles to Monsiváis's journalism and states that Castellanos's pieces "are part of a lively tradition of the crónica, or short creative prose piece popular in Latin American writing" (*A Rosario Castellanos Reader* 39).

includes the articles Castellanos wrote from Tel Aviv, from the first article entitled “Partir es morir un poco: camino a Tel Aviv” published in *Excélsior* April 3, 1971, to her last posthumously published article of which I’ve spoken in the introduction: “Recado a Gabriel: donde se encuentre” August 26, 1974.

Before the publication of the three volumes of *Mujer de palabras*, fourteen of Castellanos’s *Excélsior* articles from Tel Aviv had been republished in *El uso de la palabra* (1974) edited by José Emilio Pacheco and published the same year as Castellanos’s death. *El uso de la palabra* is the only anthology of Castellanos’s nonfiction written that reprinted exclusively Castellanos’s *Excélsior* journalism.

In “The Task of the Translator,” his seminal essay on translation, Benjamin posits that: “In a [work’s] afterlife – which could not be called that if were not a transformation and a renewal of something living - the original undergoes a change” (256).⁷¹ Similarly, in Pacheco’s introduction to *El uso de la palabra*, the implication of a resurrection lies in his oft cited statement, “no supimos leerla.” These words are both a eulogy and an invitation. Castellanos’s articles, anthologized and republished some fifty years after their initial publication, likewise go through a transformation.

By a close reading of Castellanos’s Tel Aviv journalism, I explore the themes which I emphasize in her letters to her husband in *Cartas a Ricardo*, the primary text of my first two chapters, themes such as maternity, the appearance and consistency of the letter, the fluidity of the “I,” and the creation of her own self through writing. The kind of journalism Castellanos

⁷¹ As part of Reyes’s search for the complete collection of Castellanos’s essays, she notes that in *Excélsior* archives, she was given five folders with Castellanos’s articles and that the articles themselves were sometimes in very poor condition: “las hojas amarillentas, a veces con cinta adhesiva pegada encima del artículo mismo.... (*Mujer* 16). I see in this quote with the image of the crumbling, yellowing paper, a death, of returning to the earth.

practiced, with its roots in the Latin American chronicle, as in the personal letter, requires the use of the first person, “donde habla en su propio nombre” (O’Connell 38). And as Castellanos’s letters to her husband allow her to create herself as a literary character so, too, does her journalism. Reyes addresses the development of Castellanos’s voice in the trajectory of her published articles: “En mi percepción, después de poner en orden cronológico todos los ensayos que encontré y leerlos de nuevo, advertí el desarrollo de su voz narrativa, un aumento evidente en la seguridad de sí misma, en la cercanía con sus lectores, en el uso del humor y la ironía tras los años” (*Recuerdo* 65-66). As well, Ahearn notes that the articles in the autobiographical section, (articles primarily written in Israel) of *El uso de la palabra*: “son claros ejemplos del ‘nuevo estilo’ de ensayo que practicaba Castellanos en el apogeo de su producción creativa” (“Puertas adentro,” 220). Indeed, I am interested in exploring this “confident” narrative voice and ‘nuevo estilo’ in Castellanos’s essays.

4.2 Journalism and Letters

In *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America before Telecommunications*, Decker speaks of the ephemeral quality of letters. Journalism, like letters, can be considered “a subliterature traditionally considered ancillary to major achievement” (16). Chronicles, like letters, once they are compiled into a book acquire a distinct meaning. In “Questioning the Chronicle,” José Joaquín Blanco includes himself in what he calls a minority of writers who “[take] on the chronicle as a literary text, as well as a journalistic endeavor, with greater ambitions and greater rigor in its language, its conception, and its discourse. In fact, I tend to compile my best chronicles into formal books of literature” (62). The relative accessibility of pieces anthologized in a book as opposed to articles which have not been anthologized can be seen in the words of

Carlos Monsiváis in the introduction to *A ustedes les consta: antología de la crónica en México* (1980), where he notes: “A la presente antología la limita muy esencialmente, derivar, en la mayoría de los casos, su material de libros, por lo que los incluidos suelen ser más escritores que periodistas (y si insisto en distinción tan torpe y riesgosa lo hago sobre todo por facilidades de identificación laboral) ...” (13). Monsiváis acknowledges: “Una antología irreprochable de la crónica en México necesitaría de la resurrección hemerográfica de un sinnúmero de textos espléndidos nunca recogidos en libros...” (13). Here, he admits that the division he proposes between journalists and writers is at best an awkward one, one in which I believe Castellanos would concur. In *Rereading the Spanish American Essay: Translations of 19th and 20th Century Women’s Essays*, (1995) Doris Meyer addresses the inaccessibility of the essays in the collection: “women’s contributions to the genre have been virtually ignored” (ix). Meyers attributes the marginalization of essays written by women in Latin American to the fact that the ideas in the essays “did not conform to gender expectations” (ix). She states that the genre of the essay has been considered, since the era of Independence, a male domain, as Franco would say of the novel, where “[t]he problem of national identity was presented primarily as a problem of male identity...” (*Plotting Women* 131). So, the essays or chronicles that are not collected in books, as is the case with the anthology edited by Monsiváis, are not considered for anthologies. And to a greater degree these are women’s essays. It could be said that Castellanos’s essays have been doubly ignored, by being essays written by a Latin American writer and by being essays written by a woman.

On writing of published collections of letters, Decker argues that: “The life and the book: these remain the organizing principles...A bound book: an object that differs from the autograph missives generated by the unbounded discourse of the epistolary exchange” (35). When

Castellanos's articles from Tel Aviv are compiled into one volume, the articles reassemble themselves into a hybrid form distinct from an individual article and distinct from the selected editions of Castellanos's nonfiction writing. In *Artículos rescatados*, vol. 3, with all the articles published in chronological order and which include the editor's notes to Castellanos's last two posthumously published articles, there is a narrative arc, a beginning, a middle and an end which tells the story of Castellanos's departure to Israel accompanied by Gabriel and of her startling and tragic death, some three and a half years later.

I have spoken in my previous chapters of the difficulty of endings for the solitary female travelers, like Castellanos, like Wollstonecraft, of whom, unlike male travelers, they "cannot simply return home" (Favret 120). With this in mind, in my conclusion, I look at Castellanos's last published article from Tel Aviv, and what, as readers, it can tell us.

When Castellanos served in Israel, as she reminds her readers in her posthumously published article, "Jerusalén celeste, Jerusalén terrenal," Israel was only twenty-six years old. In her Israeli journalism, Castellanos wrote of the terrorist attack in Lod airport, May 1972, when twenty-six people were killed by members of the Japanese Red Army; the kidnapping and murder of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympic summer games and the Israeli-Gaza conflict in the Yom Kippur War, October 1973. In the month I am reading Castellanos's Israeli journalism, the Israeli Palestinian conflict escalates with increased violence between the period of May 10th to May 21st, 2021. Indeed, when analyzing Castellanos's journalism, I endeavor to look at it not as an artifact but as something with relevance for today.

4.3 Distances Between

There are several ways in which Castellanos's letters from Spain and the U.S. collected in *Cartas a Ricardo* and her Israeli journalism correspond to each other. First, with the distances, geographical, cultural, and linguistic, between these places and Mexico City, the destination of her letters and articles. Mexico City which Castellanos, in her letters from the U.S. euphemistically refers to as "la región más transparente." Importantly, the themes in Castellanos's journalism—the precariousness of the postal system, the passage of time, the long distances from Mexico City, isolation, the press and letters—echo the lament of the young narrator from Castellanos's first novel *Balún Canán*:

Estamos tan aislados en Comitán durante la temporada de lluvias. Estamos tan lejos siempre. Una vez vi un mapa de la República y hacia el sur acababa donde vivimos nosotros. Después ya no hay ninguna otra ruedita. Sólo una raya para marcar la frontera. Y la gente se va. Y cuando se va escribe. Pero sus palabras nos llegan tantas semanas después que las recibimos marchitas y sin olor como las flores viejas. Y ahora el cartero no nos trajo nada. Mi padre volverá a leer la prensa de la vez anterior. (43)

From Tel Aviv, Castellanos writes of receiving the newspapers from Mexico long after they are initially published and the long distances that her articles must travel to reach the offices of *Excélsior*. In my second chapter, I wrote of the immense bureaucracy of Mexico City, what Ángel Ramos calls "la ciudad letrada," with the country's intellectuals' affiliation, including Castellanos's and her husband's, with the National University. The above quoted passage from *Balún Canán* addresses the centrality of Mexico City, the place of origin of the narrator's father's newspaper. Meanwhile, the narrator and her father and their family exist on the periphery. Indeed, the small city where they live barely makes it onto the national map, its

defining “ruedita” placed precariously on the very edge of the country. Importantly, the region in which Castellanos and her family and the Argüellos of *Balún Canán* inhabit, holds more traits in common, geographically, linguistically and culturally, with the bordering highlands of Guatemala than with Mexico City in Mexico’s center valley. In the colonial landowning system to which Castellanos is heir, a small group of families owned large extensions of land on which they grew coffee, sugarcane and raised cattle in Chiapas and neighboring Guatemala. When Castellanos writes to Guerra in Mexico City from Europe and from the U.S. and submits her articles to Julio Scherer at the *Excélsior* offices from the Mexican Embassy in Tel Aviv, her writing occupies the space between. Like the girl in *Balún Canán*, Castellanos speaks from the edges, but remains always conscious of the center. As a woman, Castellanos would always be other but, as O’Connell argues, but she uses her position as editorial page writer at *Excélsior* “to authorize her introduction of women’s experiences and perspectives into the arena of public intellectual life in Mexico” (528).

4.4 Naming the Constancy

To see all of Castellanos’s Tel Aviv articles anthologized in one volume, is to witness the consistency with which Castellanos wrote and mailed her articles to the *Excélsior* offices.⁷² Constancy, as an attribute in a writer, appears in Castellanos’s story, “Álbum de familia,”⁷³ the ninth chapter of *Rito de iniciación*. Four women, former students of Matilda Casanova, recent winner of a prestigious literary award, have been invited to a reunion at a resort hotel in

⁷² In *Artículos rescatados vol. 3*, there are 96 articles previously published in *Excélsior*, three published in *Diorama de la cultura* and an article on Sartre which was initially published in *Revista de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, April 1973.

⁷³ *Álbum de familia* was published in 1974 with the title story and three additional stories.

Acapulco by Victoria, Matilda Casanova's assistant. Two university students have also been invited, Cecilia, the protagonist of *Rito de iniciación*, and Susana, her best friend. After serving as witnesses to Matilda Casanova's brilliance but also to her capriciousness and her deteriorating and dependent state, the recently divorced Elvira, speaks of her career as a writer: "Me dedicué entonces a cultivar las virtudes que me correspondían, la constancia, por ejemplo. Y pude lograr que las restricciones de mi vocabulario se transformaron en estilo... (293)

This naming of constancy as a virtue, as the character of Elvira does in the above quote, echoes the constancy which Castellanos writes of in her letters to Guerra, of which I spoke in the first chapter. The appearance of the letter itself carries a message as do Castellanos's articles from Tel Aviv. Also, like the character of Elvira, Castellanos's state-imposed duties gradually increased. First as the Secretary of Press and Information at the National University, and then as ambassador.

In her letters to Guerra from the U.S., Castellanos also names the consistency with which she writes: "Te escribí hace dos días, pero me quedaron muchas cosas por decirte. Además, es con esta periodicidad, 'martes y jueves', como puedo hacerlo, porque el resto de los días no tengo máquina" (*Cartas* 263). Importantly, in both the article "¿Y qué?" and in the letter from Madison, Castellanos presents the typewriter as necessary for writing. Drawing attention to the typewriter and, by implication, a typewritten document, lends the document an authority that a handwritten document lacks and locates the document in a territory outside the traditional fiction of feminine letters "which equates letters and love, women's writing and the writing of the heart" (Gilroy and Verhoeven 3). In addition, Castellanos plays with the fiction of feminine letter writing which I explore below.

The following quote addresses the materialism of her written piece as it travels from Castellanos's apartment in the Mexican Embassy in Tel Aviv to Mexico City:

A partir de este momento se empieza a calcular: ¿cuánto tiempo va a permanecer en el buzón mientras viene el empleado postal a recoger la correspondencia? ¿Cuánto tiempo va a madurar en la oficina de correos mientras lo examinan, lo olfatean, lo clasifican y, al fin, lo colocan en la pila de cartas que van a volar por los aires, como las golondrinas, atravesando el mar hasta posarse en el Nuevo Mundo? ¿Qué tan largo va a ser su turno de espera en el aeropuerto de Lod? ¿Cuánto dura el vuelo transatlántico si descartamos los atentados y los secuestros posibles? ¿Cuándo va a llegar a las manos de mi cartero? (*Mujer* 315)

Castellanos uses adjectives associated with femininity to describe her article: “*hermoso* artículo, *sutiles* observaciones, *graciosas* retruécanos, insinuaciones *veladas*,” to play with the notion of her written piece belonging to the private, feminine sphere. However, once it is mailed “en el buzón,” the treatment it will receive can best be described as neglectful, not to mention potentially fatal with the material reality of the possibilities of “secuestros.” The shift from the private space to the public space reflects the journey of a letter. Newspaper articles, unlike personal letters, do not have the pretense of being private, but the same principle applies where Castellanos plays with the public and private nature of these genres.

Like Wollstonecraft, Castellanos has “faith in the letter form” which “verifies the intrinsic, ongoing dialogism of language” (Favret 191). In her journalism, she often addresses the reader with the formal *you*. In this way, the narrator performs intimacy, i.e.: you are in your house, I am in my house, we are friends, we meet on the editorial pages. In “Actos de presencia: apuntes de posguerra,” Castellanos addresses the reader with the formal *you*: “Entre las muchas

cosas que yo le debo a usted hay una que, por lo menos, reconozco aquí abiertamente: le debo noticias. Porque las últimas que le envié fueron lanzadas como una botella al mar” (*Mujer* 365).

Meanwhile, Castellanos plays up her role as a divorced woman who is raising her son alone in a foreign country; she presents herself as someone who loved the wrong man. These characteristics lends her a saintly mien that serves her in her public role. Among the diverse registers she employs are the language of psychology and confessional language. In: “El zipper: hora de la verdad,” June 19, 1973, she lists the facts of her life which have led her to be able to experience long periods of solitude and, thereby, be an ideal candidate for an ambassadorial post:

Luego contraí un matrimonio que era estrictamente monoándrico por mi parte y totalmente poligámico por la parte contraria. Tuve tres hijos, de los cuales murieron los dos primeros. Recibí el acta de mi divorcio (cuyos trámites se habían iniciado con la debida anticipación) ya en mi casa de Tel Aviv.

Añade usted a todo ello que soy tímida y que, mientras no fue mi obligación, no asistí a ninguna fiesta por temor a mezclarme con los demás a confundirme, a abolir esa distancia que tan a salvo me mantenía de todo contacto sentimental” (*Mujer* 312)

The language in the first paragraph of the above quote registers as the psychological language used in a case study with clinical terms such as “monoándrico” and “poligámico.”⁷⁴ Castellanos uses the phrase: “la parte contraria” instead of “my husband.” The phrases “(cuyos trámites se habían iniciado con la debida anticipación)” and “contraí un matrimonio” have a legal register.

The fact that Castellanos introduced her personal history in her journalism, with her marital state,

⁷⁴ Castellanos, in Mexico City of the 1960’s saw psychologists such as Santiago Ramírez (1921 – 1989). The language reflects the cultural transformations of the 1960’s with the emergence of psychoanalysis as a more widespread phenomenon in the educated upper class which Castellanos and her husband, Guerra, belonged to.

her husband's infidelities, and the death of two of her children, would be exceptional. In the early 1970s, these subjects would be considered unseemly. When she addresses the death of her children, she opens a space for mourning, often considered a private matter, not one to be spoken of in a national newspaper. The detached language which she employs could potentially disguise the subversive nature of this very personal information.

In the second paragraph of the above cited quote, which begins with: "Añade *usted* a todo ello", the "I" employs a personal tone, creating intimacy, with the use of "usted," addressing the reader. In other words, I am like you, "una mujer común y corriente." Likewise, the meaning in Castellanos's journalism is ultimately constructed by the reader of the text which is not the "you" that Castellanos addresses just as Castellanos is not the "I." Rather the "you" and the "I" are what Favret calls "mobile points."⁷⁵

4.5 The Private and the Public

Ahearn argues that Castellanos, notwithstanding her criticism of the severe limitations the domestic space affords to women, "recurrió a espacios domésticos y corporales para forjar sus argumentos" (200). In Israel, Castellanos's residence, owned by the state, is where she lives with Gabriel and Bolaños and the setting of many of her later articles. Adelina Zendejas, a resident of Mexico City, a contemporary of Castellanos's, argues: "La otra parte del rubro la que enseña su grandeza y a la que pocos dan importancia es el ejercicio de la maternidad, que fue conocido en

⁷⁵ See Favret's analysis of the use of epistolary form in Shelley's *Frankenstein*: Like a letter with its "structural and geographical" instability literary correspondence must be able to function with no central position, without even two fixed and balanced poles. The center removed, there yet exists an entire field of play between two mobile points, no matter how far and wide each point moves. In place of an object in focus, the novel reveals a vast, ever-expanding plane of intersections" (Favret 194).

su colaboración desde el extranjero” (“Maestra madre madre maestra” 51). The articles in which Castellanos writes of her son and her relationship with Bolaños constitute “el apogeo” of her journalism and, as Zendejas comments, it is on these matters, precisely “el ejercicio de la maternidad que pocos dan importancia” (51), that Castellanos because she writes publicly of her divorce and her husband’s infidelities, the death of her children among other topics, does not conform to gender expectations. It is the articles when she writes of Gabriel and their relationship that most resemble her letters from Indiana. And the setting, instead of the Tulip Tree, is now the embassy of Mexico in Tel Aviv. I further develop these ideas on the section on Gabriel’s narration.

4.5.1 The Introduction of Herlinda Bolaños

Herlinda Bolaños, a (real-life) character in *Cartas a Ricardo*, reappears in Israel, but unlike in *Cartas a Ricardo*—where, from the moment of her arrival, Castellanos places her front and center—not until Castellanos’s third year in Israel in her journalism does she mention Bolaños. Bolaños, by her first name, “Herlinda,” first appears in: “Gabriel en Israel: programa de política estudiantil,” dated March 21, 1973. Indeed, after three years in Israel, by speaking of the woman who looks after her son when she is at work would indicate Castellanos feels more confident introducing domestic concerns. In “Pequeña guerra: el frente doméstico,” from May 3, 1973, Castellanos states her three main concerns on arriving in Israel: “ubicarme, ubicar a Gabriel; ubicar a Herlinda. ¿En ese orden? No siempre” (290). In this observation, she draws attention, as a professional woman with a young child, to the non negotiable role that Bolaños plays in her life. Mexican women, readers of *Excélsior*, as they leave their homes in unprecedented numbers for offices and classrooms, relate to Castellanos’s concern: who will look after my children while I am at work? In this article, in addition, Castellanos acknowledges the previous exclusion of

Bolaños from her oeuvre: “Ahora en lo que se refiere a Herlinda...//*No sé si alguna vez se la he descrito*. Hace tantos años que vivimos juntas y próximas que es muy posible que no me haya fijado nunca en sus facciones” (190 emphasis added). Whether what Castellanos says is true or not, that she has really not noticed Bolaños’s features, she apologizes for not introducing Bolaños sooner; she has done her a disservice and she comes clean by addressing the importance of Bolaños in her life. Previously, Castellanos has introduced other members of the embassy staff, the embassy secretary, Esther Levi, as well as her chauffeur and friend, Israel Maya, in “Israel Maya: del habla sefardí,” March 2, 1973. She has covered dignitaries, for instance Moshe Dayan’s widow and George Wise, the president of the University of Tel Aviv in: “El doctor George Wise: entusiasmo y capacidad de dar,” June 5, 1971.

I wrote in my second chapter how Bolaños served Castellanos as a kind of mirror and, that on occasion, Bolaños took on the traditional feminine role, whereas Castellanos would take the traditional masculine role. Gallo remarks that, in Indiana: “The relationship between these two women is fundamental to Castellanos’s journey over the course of the year and beyond. In addition to the fact that Herlinda was her only stable companion throughout her lonely year in the U.S. the two also shared in the stress of taking care of Gabriel...” (309) Likewise in Israel, Bolaños shares the stress of taking care of Gabriel, in addition, the two women can speak Spanish with each other, and in this way Bolaños serves as an important linguistic anchor for Castellanos in both the U.S. and Israel. Gallo also posits that in Indiana, Bolaños’s own emancipation process began (309). In Castellanos’s much anthologized article, “Las servidumbres: Herlinda se va,” August 24, 1971, she goes back over her relationship with Bolaños. In effect, the article serves as a farewell to Bolaños honoring the two women’s long relationship. They lived in exile with Gabriel, in the U.S., in Madison, Bloomington and Boulder

and in Tel Aviv. “Las servidumbres,” as well as “Pequeña guerra,” also serves as a *mea culpa* for Castellanos for her treatment of the Indigenous women who worked as her maids.⁷⁶

4.6 The Multiple Self

Castellanos places importance on conserving the private self. In Castellanos’s posthumously published novel, *Rito de iniciación*, the character Matilde Casanova declares: “[...] llené de pistas falsas mis libros para que me busquen en donde no estoy” (222). Violent imagery evokes the pursuit by others. Here, the character based on arguably the most famous female writer in Latin America, not only the first Latin American to win the Noble prize in literature, but a woman, speaks of “pistas falsas.” Likewise, Castellanos, in her journalism, plays with levels of disguise such as wigs, makeup and hairstyles. The “I” in Castellanos’s articles is not one person or inviolate,⁷⁷ but the “I” is multiple. She is “la abnegada mujercita mexicana” who buys her son a dog even though dogs scare her, the Mexican ambassador who can request and be granted an appointment with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, who can leave with her son, on a direct flight to Mexico on the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War. Castellanos also breaks away from the inviolable “I” and “myself” by emphasizing personal relationships: her chauffeur who becomes her friend, Israel Maya, her relationship with Bolaños with whom she speaks Spanish for two hours a day; Esther Levi; Nahum Megged, a professor at the University of Jerusalem where

⁷⁶ “Las servidumbres: Herlinda se va” has been reprinted in *El uso de la palabra* and in *A Rosario Castellanos Reader* translated by Maureen Ahearn. It has been much commented on by, among others, Gallo, Debra Castillo, Lourdes Pazcano.

⁷⁷ See Nahum Megged’s: *Rosario Castellanos: un largo camino a la ironía*, El Colegio de México, 1994: “No había dualismo en Rosario Castellanos. La que escribió fue la expresión de la que vivió” (10).

Castellanos teaches and takes classes. And, most importantly, Gabriel. Castellanos did not walk alone. In her sharing, or what Poniatowska names as washing her dirty linen in public,⁷⁸ Castellanos's journalism defies what Brodzki calls: socially constructed definitions of appropriate female behavior (*Autobiography* 8). The mobile subject is reflected in Castellanos's writing. "By involving so many languages in the refractions of her own intentions, Shelley [or Castellanos] remains free of the conventions, while refusing to cancel the voice of any one tradition" (Favret 191). Literary critic Bakhtin believed that "literary language [is] a varied mix of literary and opposing voices" (Holquist xxix). Literary language, the language Castellanos employs, is not a closed off system but invites varied forms. Of the twentieth century visual art forms, collage is the most representative of Castellanos's journalism.

As I noted in chapter two, the masculine autobiography relies on the Western ideal of an essential, inviolable self, whereas women's autobiography necessarily needs to be between the individual consciousness and the other. The unstable nature of the "I" contributes to there being no central narrator. The book serves as a means of self-definition even though the self, the "I" inside the covers, cannot easily be pinned down. Castellanos is the mother; she is the ambassador, her life negotiated through a chauffeur. Her literary style evokes weaving with its distinct register which includes Spanish idiomatic expressions, lyrics of popular songs, quotes by poets, the language of tourism and military occupation, and expressions from Hebrew.

Castellanos quotes from a wide range of writers from the erudite to the popular: Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, Gabriel Mistral, Octavio Paz, André Gide, Agustín Lara, to name just a few; she

⁷⁸ See Poniatowska: "A ella debemos agradecerle al haber acercado a muchos a la literatura al hacerla más familiar, más doméstica, más *wash* and wear..." La ropa se lava en casa. Rosario la lavó a la vista de miles de lectores... " (*¡Ay vida! no me mereces* 57).

quotes Golda Meir, she refers to literary or historical characters such as Françoise, the cook in Proust, and Françoise's kitchen assistant whose fingers are sore from peeling asparagus. She uses popular sayings and the language of contemporary commercialism, for instance, when after visiting a travel agency, and being told the itinerary for a trip to India: "Las obras completas hindúes en una semana. Descensos a grutas, ascensos a Himalayas, paseos en loma de elefante, contemplación de Taj Mahal en adecuada noche de luna...todo esto compartido... con 'quién me depare el destino'" (*Mujer* 385). The quote, "quien me depare el destino" stems from the fact that, as a single woman, to travel economically she will need to share accommodation with another person. In this passage, she makes fun of the euphemistic narrative when the fact is that if she wants her own room, she will need to pay double. She names Mexican foods like serrano chiles which no self-respecting Mexican tourist, and here she includes herself, leaves home without. Her language is rightly considered as "un puente entre las formas de hablar de académico y de lo popular" (Perus 45). Castellanos juxtaposes distinct registers next to each other. In her article "Cigarra en verano: las hormigas pueden esperar" dated July 16, 1974, which I quoted from above, she introduces the ads for single travelers from the back pages of French news magazines, *L'Express* or *Le Nouvel Observateur*, whose objective is to "ponerse en contacto con otras personas y, bueno, darse una oportunidad para que las afinidades se revelen y las almas gemelas se reconozcan" (386). The reason she reads these magazines, she claims, is to find out what they are saying about the conflict in the Middle East from Paris, and, in this way, she juxtaposes commentary on the political situation and her role as an international diplomat with the classified ads. As a divorced woman and as a state functionary she is not immune to either.

In an article on her chauffeur, “Israel Maya, del habla sefardi,” March 2, 1973, in which she introduces Maya and proceeds, using third person and in ladino, to tell his story, she imitates his speech: “Él era ainda un mancebico cuando se topó con Malka, poverata, menor que él dos años y ya huérfana. Se placieron mucho y del placerse y namorarse hubo poco de andar. (*Mujer* 256). Thus, she populates her work, as in a play, with the voices of the (real-life) characters who work for the embassy. Indeed, Maya, as well as his family, makes several appearances in the course of her journalism, as the embassy increasingly becomes the setting for Castellanos’s articles.

In “La pequeña guerra: los otros frentes” May 15, 1973, Castellanos borrows military terminology, not only in the title with the use of “frentes,” to apply to her weekly visits to either one of her two hairdressers. Previously she had used the term, “frentes,” to apply to the relations between the embassy domestic staff. She denominates these hairdressers as X and as Y. “A adquirir algunas nociones de estrategia (los mapas de la guerra de los Seis Días me resultan utilísimos) para recurrir al salón de la belleza más próximo a mi lugar de operaciones” (*Mujer* 267). Israel is a militarized country which since the Six-Day War (June 1967) controls occupied territories, and Castellanos presents her access to her hairdressers as a military operation. She characterizes X and Y as not only not knowing of each other’s existence but as having diametrically opposed approaches to stylizing hair. The result of their distinct approaches is that the narrator becomes two distinct women:

La gente no me reconoce. Porque no es sólo el aspecto lo que cambia: es también la actitud, la conducta. X produce una personalidad rígida, convencional, y melindrosa. Con el respaldo de Y me atrevería. a atravesar a nado el Canal de la Mancha, porque el del

Suez, aunque más próximo no funciona. Gracias a tales alternativas resultó una mujer impredecible y enigmática. (*Mujer* 298)

Here the “I” is mobile. It all depends on the hairstyle, and in this way, Castellanos avoids a fixed visual representation. Like the character, Matilda Casanova, she throws out “pistas falsas.” When Castellanos says that the Suez Canal “no funciona” it is because since the Six-Day War Israeli forces have occupied the Sinai Peninsula including the entire east bank of the Suez Canal. Castellanos’s hairdressers themselves would seem to be representative of the military situation in Israel. Castellanos denominates hairdresser X as belonging to “la vieja guardia,” which evokes Moshe Dayan (1915-1981) a former military leader and politician, famous for his eye patch, as opposed to Y, with her modern style which speaks to contemporary technocratic Israeli politicians.

4.7 Israel and Mexico

In Castellanos’s journalism from Tel Aviv, she often compares Mexico and Israel. For example, in two articles published chronologically: “Educar a los niños: razón del esfuerzo israelí” *Excelsior*, August 4, 1972, and “Nuestra falla educativa: un analfabeto mexicano en Israel,” *Excelsior*, August 8, 1972. In the first of these two articles, she writes about the education system on the kibbutz where the focus is on the child. Her “I” is absent from this article. In effect, she is translating the Israeli school system for Mexican readers. In the second article, after she describes summer in the embassy (very quiet), she tells the story of receiving a phone call in the middle of the night from the airport information office. There is a lost Mexican man. The next morning when this man arrives at Mexican embassy Castellanos learns that he has been contracted to build houses in Israel. He had waited two days in the waiting room in Orly, Paris.

He had been waiting at Lod, the Tel Aviv airport, when a woman had told him about the Mexican embassy. Castellanos laments the lack of education of a compatriot who does not know how to read or write but can build houses. She blames the Mexican education system. “Es este el hombre que forma nuestro sistema educativo. ¿Un hombre que desarrolla más que un aspecto de su personalidad y que deja que se atrofien los otros...No sabe cómo se dice Air France pero usa sus servicios” (*Mujer* 209).

4.8 Representations and Identity

Just as the letter form which Castellanos favors is a liminal form existing on the border between the public and private spheres, so is the Mexican Embassy in Tel Aviv a private space and a public space. It represents Mexican soil inside of Israel, but it is also where Castellanos lives along with her son and Bolaños in a reconfigured family that we saw in Castellanos’s letters from Indiana. In “Al día: la señora avestruz,” Castellanos reports that whenever a Mexican woman comes to visit her at the embassy, to her chagrin they comment, “¡qué bonito apartamento tienes! Grrr y yo soy la Embajadera, Embajatriz, Emperatriz o Avestruz...” (*Mujer* 370). She is frustrated, “Grrr,” because the visiting Mexican women appear to overlook her status as a diplomat and instead see her apartment as a private space which would be the gender norm. However, Castellanos’s subsequent assertion of her status fluctuates, with a list of the different names for her position, beginning with a non-standardized feminine form of *Embajador*, *Embajadera*, – in romance languages the feminine form of a profession is often suspect – to *Emperatriz*, which was the name given to her by her first chauffeur and then to its final evolution, *Avestruz*. A name designated to her by Gabriel. This playful and somewhat ridiculous name speaks to Castellanos’s and her son’s contemporary mother/son relationship, a

transition from the strict hierarchal parent child relationships of Castellanos's own childhood. Meanwhile, her identity remains in flux, it is hard to pin down as one thing. As a woman, her identity is relational, different people have assigned her the different names. As Castellanos plays with the gradations of the official name for her position, degrading it to "Avestruz," Gabriel's narrative voice, as in her letters from the U.S., interrupts her narrative. By referring to herself as an "avezstruz" she concedes her "authorial status" and prioritizes Gabriel's designation. The ostrich proverbially buries its head in the sand to hide from its enemies. Is Castellanos implying that, notwithstanding her disguises, her wigs, her sunglasses, the fluidity of her "I," that she remains an easy target? That she is, indeed, a strange bird in a strange land?

In "*De cómo hacerse famosa: A pesar de proponérselo*," June 10, 1974, Castellanos again plays with levels of physical identity. Her character undergoes various transformations. The article begins in a domestic setting - the interior, domestic space which Ahearn refers to and then move to a space of international politics:⁷⁹ "Ahora que me estaba maquillando para asistir a la cena que el gobierno de Israel le ofrece al presidente Nixon y al ministro de Estado, profesor Kissinger (y no presumo nada, ¿verdad?) estaba pensando en lo que son las cosas" (*Mujer* 376). At the time Castellanos was in Israel Kissinger was practicing what is called "shuttle diplomacy," where he was negotiating with Arab leaders. When Castellanos applies the makeup, an everyday act for many women, she applies a disguise. Will we, the reader, who has been invited into her domestic space recognize her once she steps outside it? Later, she disguises herself using sunglasses. The irony is that in this instance, she is hoping to be recognized as a

⁷⁹ Henry Kissinger (1923 -) served as U.S. Secretary of State under President Richard Nixon. He played a crucial role in the Middle East. In "En su patria: carta a Gabriel," Castellanos talks about the recent unveiling of a wax figure of Kissinger which she says has the merit of having Kissinger remain still, "por la única ocasión, en su vida, al doctor Kissinger en reposo" (389) Here she makes a reference to what is called Kissinger's shuttle politics.

writer: “Ocurrió que después de largas negociaciones emergió a la luz pública la traducción de *Balún Canán*, al hebreo. Yo comencé a salir a la calle con gafas negras para ser reconocida por las periodistas y con la pluma en ristre para satisfacer a los cazadores de autógrafos. ¿Qué pasó? Nada” (*Mujer* 378)

The twist occurs when she begins to receive phone calls with congratulations but discovers they are not for the translation of *Balún Canán* into Hebrew but for a recipe, "Pollo a la Maya," published in a local newspaper accompanied by a photograph attributed to her, “en mis primeras encarnaciones.” The photo, she implies, does not represent a mature, accomplished woman, but a younger and less cosmopolitan version of herself. Initially, she claims not to remember anything about the recipe but then recalls a journalist had asked her for a Mexican recipe. In turn, Castellanos tells the reader: “Así que le pedí por favor a Esthercita que tomara un libro y escogiera la receta más corta y le bautizara con un nombre folclórico” (378). Her readers will be familiar with Esther Levi, the secretary in the Mexican Embassy, the subject of an earlier article, “Perfil de Esther: El Dolor y la Esperanza,” Sept. 30, 1972, a concentration camp survivor who lived with her adoptive parents in Argentina before emigrating to Israel. In other words, another woman not versed in Mexican cooking. Indeed, both these women, Levi and Castellanos, hold administrative positions, and one of their duties is to satisfy the press. Castellanos declares: “Usted sabe que la cocina y yo guardamos una respetuosa distancia” (378). In other words, why do people keep expecting me to know anything about cooking? “Pero ya comienzo a tomar medidas preventivas. Digo y sostengo en todos los tonos y en todas las ocasiones, que esa figura que desdora el texto no es mi retrato. Que es la reproducción fiel del original del pollo a la maya. Y no sé si reírme o llorar, pero el caso es que la gente acepta mi versión sin discutir” (*Mujer* 378).

By denying that the photograph is her image and attributing it to a proverbial woman she designates as the original inventor of "Pollo a la Maya," Castellanos does not allow herself to be caught in a fixed visual representation. She endeavors to throw off "pistas falsas." The "I" is perpetually in movement with fresh disguises. The possibility exists for the potential loss of power if she is known as the woman who created "Pollo a la Maya." In "Cómo hacerse famosa," she goes through a number of visual transformations, starting with the makeup she applies. Indeed, she appears in various representations: the intimate friend, the Mexican ambassador, the author, the teacher, the inventor of "Pollo a la Maya."

4.8.1 Cooking and the National Discourse

Castellanos, in her role as a political figure and as a writer, does not adhere to the traditional discourse of a Mexican wife and mother. She is divorced; she writes for the editorial page of a national newspaper where the other journalists are predominantly men. She operates in the political world of men but as a representative of Mexican woman, she is expected to be interested in cooking. She told Guerra in her letters from Spain, that cooking, and domesticity do not interest her and, in her journalism from Israel, she reiterates to her readers that she does not cook. Although upper-class Mexican women did not need to know how to sew or cook because they traditionally had servants to do these jobs, as, indeed, did Castellanos, in the national discourse Mexican women were expected to have an interest in cooking and, with the cook, oversee the daily menu.⁸⁰ Jeffrey Pilcher argues that in Mexico, in the years following the era of

⁸⁰ See Castellanos's poem, "Valium 10": "Y repasas las cuentas del gasto y reflexiones/junto con la cocinera, sobre el costo/ de la vida y el *ars magna* combinatoria/ del que surge el menú posible y cotidiano."

Porfirio Díaz, “the exchange of cooking tips became the focus of charities, which were the only legitimate female activities outside of the home” (212).

Jane Marcus in “Invisible Mediocrity: *The Private Selves of Public Women*,” analyses autobiographies by three prominent turn-of-the century white women and, what she remarks upon is not “the female struggle to enter male public discourse” but rather “the recognition of the inability of that discourse to include [these women’s] voices in its history, the necessity of the return to the personal” (115). In “Cómo hacerse famosa,” Castellanos plays with her entry into the annals of history. Her novel *Balún Canán* has just been published in a Hebrew translation but she makes the following claim: “Así es que si alguna vez paso a la historia será por eso y nada más por eso” (378). In other words, it will not be as the author of *Balún Canán*, it will be for a recipe. As in in her first letter from the U.S. which I mentioned in my second chapter, while in Israel, as in Wisconsin, cultural stereotypes are applied to Castellanos. At a macro level, the level of global feminist discourses, Gallo posits that Castellanos has not been accorded the status of French and American second-wave feminist pioneers because cultural stereotypes have been applied to her. Indeed, Castellanos has been “subject to the hegemonies of White, First World women who dominated global feminist agendas” (Gallo 164). And that “Castellanos recognizes her double discrimination as a Mexican abroad and as a woman at home” (167). In Castellanos’s most anthologized story, “Lección de cocina,” the action takes place in the immaculate kitchen of a newly married woman who prepares a cut of meat for her husband’s and her dinner. In the form of an interior monologue, the woman addresses traditional gender roles while she reflects on the irony of her destiny: “Yo anduve extraviada en aulas, en calles, en oficinas, en cafés...” (241). Here, likewise, she addresses the difficulty, as woman, in escaping traditional gender roles.

To continue the theme of cooking and the preparation of food in Castellanos's articles, in "Biblioteca Habemus: un regalo de reyes," Mar. 9, 1972, Castellanos describes receiving four crates of books from External Relations for the embassy library. She names works included in the shipment, such as "la serie de ensayos publicados por la Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales de la UNAM. Análisis de nuestras circunstancias, proyectos, utopías. Los mitos de que nos hemos sustentado. Los mitos que se han sustentado de nosotros" (*Mujer* 157). In other words, the search for the cultural and national identity or "los proyectos políticos y sociales del país" which Castellanos travels in opposition to. Among the books she unpacks are the complete works of Marichu. Marichu is the pen name of María de Carbia who wrote over ten cookbooks on Mexican cooking including such classics as *Mexico Through My Kitchen Window* (1938) which introduced Mexican food to American audiences.

Que sus amigos no le escriben, que empieza usted a borrarse de la memoria de todos, que la fulmina el desamparo. Conjuró mágico: lee usted en voz alta, y ante un escogido auditorio, la lista de ingredientes del mole; y los pasos sucesivos de su elaboración; y el ritual que sigue para consumirlo. Cuando usted se levanta ha recuperado su equilibrio mental, sentimental y físico. Ha encontrado de nuevo, su centro de gravedad. (*Mujer* 157)

By inviting the iconic cookbook writer Marichu to participate in the dialogue, through her clear directions for a traditional Mexican recipe, Castellanos's writerly persona recovers herself. Importantly, she does not try to reproduce the recipe in an actual kitchen but recommends reading the recipe out loud in front of a select public. In this way, she takes the domestic and makes it art. In her admiration for Maria de Carbia's precise instructions, she pays homage to de Carbia who could be considered a role model as a writer of many books, and as a woman.

4.9 Gabriel: The Narrative Voice

In two of Castellanos's articles, both written in the summer shortly before her death, rather than addressing the reader, "usted" or "abnegada mujercita mexicana" (*Mujer* 151) or "Señora," Castellanos directly addresses her son and uses the intimate "tú" form. Castellanos featured her son in many of her articles from Israel: "Informe sobre Gabriel: experiencias antes las candilejas," June 22, 1972, where she talks about his performance as Polonius in a school production of Hamlet; "*Balún Canán* en Israel: Gabriel descubre la literatura," October 5, 1972; and "Gabriel en el hospital; el valor de la vida," April 14, 1973. Gabriel is also featured in many of her later articles, for instance, "Otra vez el mexicano: la diplomacia al desnudo," August 6, 1974, when she writes how she is wary of mixing him, now a teenager, with the international guests at a state dinner, "puesto que conozco la etapa ultrarroja por la que atraviesa" (*Mujer* 402). In these articles, as in her letters from Indiana, she sets up a situation, and then introduces the dialogue between herself and Gabriel. For instance, in "Otra vez el mexicano," on the occasion of the state dinner where there will be guests from South Africa and Chile present, she tells Gabriel that he does not need to mention certain controversial subjects, to which Gabriel responds: "Yo no voy a ser el que empiece...pero tampoco me voy a quedar callado si ellas me provocan." To which Castellanos replies: "No hay que quedarse callado. Basta con cambiar de conversación." Gabriel then responds: "¿Cómo se cambia? ¿Y en cuanto a Allende?" (*Mujer* 403). Gabriel's voice in these dialogues provides a counterpoint to Castellanos's. "En su patria: carta a Gabriel" July 23, 1974, y "Recado a Gabriel: donde se encuentre," August 26, 1974, Castellanos directly addresses Gabriel. In "En su patria," she begins the article with a traditional epistolary address, indeed that of a mother to a son: "Mi querido Gabriel," She concludes the letter/article by focusing on the limitations due to paper, an epistolary trope. "Se me acaba el

espacio” (*Mujer* 391). Here “the pronounced conventions of the epistle form yield to the disruptions implicit in the form” (Favret 196). She plays with the public/private nature of the letter, stating that because she does not have patience to wait for the mailman, she has resorted to the medium of the newspaper. The irony, of course, is that the letter is not private but will be published in a national newspaper.

Yo no la tengo y me imagino que tú también andas bastante escaso de ella [paciencia] así que elijo mejor este medio de comunicarme contigo que tiene la ventaja, además, que es completamente discreto y de que nadie (aparte de los interlocutores) va a enterarse de la conversación, ni de que tú estás en México, dándote tus verdes con tus azules ni yo en Tel Aviv, deteniendo el cerro. (*Mujer* 388)

The narrator plays with the fiction of the private nature of correspondence when she says that nobody will know about this conversation, so she is choosing, for the sake of expediency, instead of waiting for the postmen to use “este medio” which is the *Excélsior* editorial page. By addressing Gabriel, and publishing in a newspaper, what could appear to be a personal letter from a mother to a son, she plays with the idea of letters “as a liminal form on the border between public and private spheres” (Gilroy and Verhoeven 15).

In “Recado a Gabriel,” she begins the article by using the intimate “tú”: “Cada vez que me pongo a escribirte ...” (*Mujer* 408). In this opening, with the use of “cada vez” she acknowledges the act of writing to her son as something she does regularly. Indeed, she exploits the epistolary form by drawing attention to it. Again, Castellanos draws attention to the physicality of the letter, the page, “Así yo quisiera conciliar en una página que te va dirigida...” The focus on the physical letter, signals “an obstacle to the inner life of its characters” (Favret 147). She addresses the duality of her roles:

Así yo quisiera conciliar en una página que te va dirigida, a la mamá que te quiere desde las meras raíces del alma (que nunca han sido verdaderamente sacudidas ni mucho menos arrancadas y que palpitan aún al ritmo de bolero que le impuso su infancia Agustín Lara) y a la escritora que está siempre al acecho de la cursilería para propinarle un buen chiste. (*Mujer* 408)

She makes an ironic reference to Agustín Lara's (1897-1950) bolero, "Arráncame la vida." In doing so, she juxtaposes maternal love, a sentiment that nationally is piously upheld, as Castellanos likes to say, "la abnegada madrecita mexicana" with the lyrics of an iconic Mexican bolero, which speaks of obsessive sexual passion. In chapter two, I explored the mother/child relationship that speaks, at the levels of the state and the family, to the legacy of colonialism with the simultaneous national elevation of the role of motherhood and corresponding devaluation of the women themselves, especially of the Indigenous women, who do the actual mothering. Gabriel, as a character, has been present in Castellanos's Tel Aviv journalism from the very beginning. In this article, she lists an additional discrepancy, the irreconcilability of a being a mother and "una atareada funcionaria que se preocupe de lo que acontece en Chipre, que descifra las noticias de Atenas y que lleva cuenta estricta del número de veces que durante esta última semana los altos dirigentes israelíes hablaron de la reanudación de las hostilidades con los árabes..." (*Mujer* 408). She has a foot in both the private sphere and the public sphere, and she juxtaposes the actuality of being a mother in political world when she addresses the potential physical danger, where war is always looming. Indeed, in her essays where Gabriel is predominantly featured, specifically her article on Gabriel in the hospital, she speaks of her vulnerability because she is responsible for raising an adolescent son; these vulnerabilities are

accentuated by geographical distance and armed conflict. In this article, she uses the dialogic quality of the letter to answer the imagined questions posed by her correspondent, Gabriel:

Si te digo que, después de que te fuiste, la casa está vacía me vas a contestar: éjele, éjele, ¿y qué pasó con Irma? ... ¿Y Rachel? – Que dijo shalom y se fue a casar a todas sus hijas después de haber discutido (y ganado la discusión, naturalmente) los términos y condiciones de la dote.

Pero te queda todavía un último cartucho: ¿y las arañas? (*Mujer* 408)

It is in the dialogic form that Castellanos can use different registers of language, including the play on an iconic Mexican song, to include Rachel's "shalom" and Gabriel's comebacks. The cast is multiple: herself, a yellow cat, cockroaches, spiders, and a neglected tree in the garden. The setting of this article is the Mexican embassy in the summer. In this article, Castellanos's last article to be published from Israel, the last words belong to Gabriel, and as Castellanos relates them, they are not spoken but written, on the back of a postcard with an image of the Aztec Calendar: "estoy muy contento. Saludos. Y firma Gabriel." (*Mujer* 411). On receiving Gabriel's postcard, with his succinct message, Castellanos exhibits faith in the letter, a faith she has displayed, each time she sits down "tañer en la máquina y redactar un hermoso artículo" (*Mujer* 315).

4.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I focus on Castellanos's journalism which she wrote while she was the Mexican ambassador to Israel. As I argued above, in the articles anthologized in *Mujer de palabras: artículos rescatados de Rosario Castellanos*, vol. III, that Castellanos wrote during the three and a half years she lived in Israel, (and especially in her last year), her narrative voice became

stronger. Although, she became more confident in introducing domestic matters into her journalism, for instance, when she first introduces Bolaños, at the same time the circumstances are more circumscribed, because she is writing for a national audience, than they would be when she writes her personal letters to Ricardo Guerra from Europe and the United States. Indeed, in her very public role as not only Mexican ambassador to Israel, but as a journalist for a national newspaper, not to mention a mother to a son in his early adolescence, the ambiguities found in these divergent identities present themselves as uneasy ones, at times irreconcilable and she finds she needs to be more circumspect. Nevertheless, she appeals to her readers, as an audience, to share her feelings. Indeed, by favoring the epistolary form in her articles, she exhibits her faith in the act of sending out a printed letter or article; the importance of launching her missive, throwing her bottle into the sea. And, indeed, it is through this faith and the distance required by the letter form where “the possibility of a language that mediates difference and communicates life,” (Favret 186) emerges.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Parting Thoughts

Castellanos's nonfiction travel writing is the most neglected by academics and translators of her writing. In my thesis, by focusing on her travel writing, I have looked at how Castellanos, by traveling, by temporarily escaping the domestic sphere, recreates the idea of home from the places where she writes, as well as how she dispels the notion of the romantic traveler, the isolated individual of the Western tradition. I also explore the idea of the impossibility for the woman traveler to safely return home, that is to say, the end of the journey. And with this in mind, I look at how Castellanos writes her endings. Castellanos uses her nonfiction travel writing to examine, importantly, her own self, her relationship to her son and others, and the situations she finds herself in. She also mourns her past. Indeed, the Chiapas of her childhood is always just below the surface – in her letters from Spain, the U.S., and her journalism from Israel. I have endeavoured to show how Castellanos, in the process of creating herself, uses the epistolary genre to answer the question that presents itself each time she sits down at the typewriter, “¿Soy o no soy una escritora? ¿Puedo escribir? ¿Qué?” (*Cartas* 186)?

Castellanos's life was marked by travel. Before reaching the age of sixteen, Castellanos, with her mother and father, had travelled long distances. From Mexico City where she was born, the family travelled by train to Comitán, Chiapas, where she passed her infancy and her childhood. From Comitán, each summer the family would migrate to their ranch in the highlands of Chiapas on horseback and famously, Castellanos and her mother would ride in chairs strapped to the back of Indigenous serfs. As a teenager, Castellanos emigrated from the periphery of Mexico to the capital. Castellanos died in a freak accident in 1974, in the Mexican embassy in Tel Aviv, Israel, a country just twenty-six years old. In the course of her life, she covered

enormous distances in time and space—geographically, linguistically, and culturally. She catapulted herself into the twentieth century, bringing her readers along with her.

It is her letters and journalism that allow her the use of the first person, and with this technique, the ability to create herself as a literary character. Although her letters, anthologized in *Cartas a Ricardo*, are addressed to her husband and, on occasion, her son, and her journalism from Tel Aviv, published in the Mexican newspaper *Excélsior*, reached a much larger readership, and she uses both these genres to establish connection and mediate distances.

Castellanos travelled with a typewriter to Spain, and managed to get hold of one while she was in the U.S. Two constants in her work, which I have addressed, are the typewriter, as necessary for her writing, and the importance of sitting down in front of the typewriter to write. In the face of her increasing bureaucratic responsibilities, in her writing she negotiated her conflicting identities as a mother, a wife, a teacher, and a writer. In the U.S., as well as in Israel, as a Mexican woman, cultural prejudices were applied to her when she was expected to be interested in Mexican cooking. As Castellanos's voice becomes more confident in her journalism from Tel Aviv, she exploits the division between private space, which has been traditionally gendered as feminine, and public space, which has been traditionally gendered as masculine. She plays with the conventions of the feminine letter writer, employing epistolary tropes such as the focus on the physical page. By introducing domestic themes, she negotiates her role as both a writer and a representative of the Mexican state in Israel who does not adhere to the traditional discourse of a Mexican wife and mother.

By studying Castellanos's nonfiction travel writing, from Spain, the U.S. and Israel, I aspire, building on the work of the academic writers and editors who have gone before me and to whom I am very grateful, to problematize commonplaces often attributed to women writers and

further open the place that Castellanos herself holds in relation to twentieth-century women's writing.

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