

Rosario Ferré's La Bella Durmiente as a *Bildungsroman*: Social Classes, Gender and Cultural Contexts*

Pedro Meléndez Páez
Doctor en Filosofía y Letras
Language Department University of Atacama

*Student Patrick Frolander collaborated with the section on Social Classes, and student Rochelle Ehlers collaborated with the section on Gender.
E-mail: pedro.melendez@uda.cl

Georg Lukács' The Theory of the Novel is the standard starting point for the analysis of the so-called *Bildungsroman*, a type of narrative that can become a heated topic, especially when its definition is applied to women's writing. In fact, from a theoretical point of view, it has been shown that there are major inconsistencies and inaccuracies when the gender of the protagonist of the novel of apprenticeship is a woman. Likewise, the original meaning given to the novel of apprenticeship emphasizes the perpetuation of the status quo by providing the male, not the female, protagonist with rules and an appropriate environment conducive to a successful immersion into society. Puerto Rican author Rosario Ferré, in her novel La Bella Durmiente (Sleeping Beauty), explores the way a woman comes to terms with society while growing up in a traditional family and in an "alienated" and patriarchal culture. Gender, as well as social classes and cultural contexts are the major aspects that make possible to see Ferré's novel as an impugning rewriting of a familiar and beautiful tale.

Social Classes

The setting in La Bella Durmiente is a glimpse of what traditional upper class society is like in Puerto Rico. The story is based on one woman's attempt, María de los Angeles, to break the chain of these traditional upper class values to fulfill her own life's dream and the struggles encountered in her journey through life. People in the upper echelon of Puerto Rican society are usually born into a family that is already wealthy. While in some cases a **man** may earn his way into the upper class by earning a good living, the same is not

true for women. Another large difference between the two classes is marriage, with respect to the actual ceremonies. Almost all upper class marriages take place in the church under the eyes of God (Tumin 256). The marriage of two upper class people is an extravagant social occasion for the other members of the upper class as portrayed in the novel. Every detail of the wedding of María de los Angeles and Felisberto was a highly publicized event in one of the local newspapers. On the other hand, an actual wedding ceremony in the lower classes often does not take place. Many lower class weddings are consensual weddings that do not involve religious ceremonies. They are not unlike a common-law marriage in the United States (Tumin 256). The upper class marriage is an autocratic relationship governed by the male of the family (Tumin 248). After the wedding ceremony, the wife becomes the absolute possession of her husband. Infidelity is commonplace among men in upper and lower classes. In a way, it is almost expected of a man to cheat on his wife with another woman; but for women it is considered the ultimate disgrace for the woman and her family. The reason behind this is the fact that women are supposed to remain pure; their image is not unlike that of a crystal (Ferré 166). Even the smallest of impurities may tarnish her image. She is supposed to be as pure as the Virgin Mary. This belief is called *marianismo* in Latin American cultures. The concern for this is seen in a letter between María de los Angeles and one of the Sisters at the catholic school she attended (Ferré 166). If a female really wanted to hurt her husband, all she would have to do is be unfaithful. This would destroy his reputation and rid him of his personal pride (Tumin 257). María de los Angeles had a

life-long dream and ambition to be great at something and that was ballet. She was an outstanding ballet performer as described in one of the upper class newspaper articles. María had an idol named Carmen Merengue, who was her antithesis. María had hoped that she could become famous in the same way Carmen had, with the difference that Carmen worked in a circus and María in a ballet company. María de los Angeles was destined to die from the beginning. She had all the cards stacked against her. On one hand, if she had stayed single and at home, she had her family blocking her success. If she stayed home, she would not be able to do the thing she loved, ballet. It was not a proper profession for someone of the upper class. It was considered "too risqué" for a proper upper class lady to be doing and would not be tolerated. Felisberto, after their marriage, wanted a child of his own. Because María did not agree to have a child, the only way for him to do it, and to stop her from being a ballerina, was to impregnate her by force, which he did. This way, he negated his promise of letting her be a ballerina. Giving birth to a child changes the woman's body and prevents her from being a great ballerina. The birth of their child was a joy for him, for her family, and for society in general, but not for María. What a story, an upper class beauty and a self-made millionaire getting together. A fairytale story for most members of the upper class, but a nightmare and the rock tied to María's ankle that was to drag her to the bottom.

The significance of the birth of a child was devastating for María. She was raped by her husband and was also raped of her dreams, those same dreams that he had promised her before their marriage. She did not take this lightly and it was time for revenge. She would rape him of his dreams though not in quite the physical manner that he raped her. She did so using infidelity, which is a destructive action against any male of the upper class. It greatly affected his reputation and his pride. María de los Angeles anonymously wrote a few letters to Felisberto claiming that she was a worker at a hotel in a lower class section of town, telling him that his wife was cheating on him. Felisberto went

to the hotel in question with a gun. He came to find María had staged an affair with another man. There was a scuffle between Felisberto and the second man and both Felisberto and María de los Angeles died.

This story is an anti-fairytale lived out by María de los Angeles and Felisberto. Instead of living happily ever after as upper class citizens of Puerto Rico, they died fatally ever after. In this story, María de los Angeles is the heroine. The protagonist is, in many ways, the traditional society of Puerto Rico. The heroic journey of María de los Angeles consisted of her struggle to become what she had always dreamed of being, a ballerina. The reason this is not a true fairytale, and is in fact an anti-fairytale, is the fact that María de los Angeles does not succeed in her heroic journey. This story is more like a Shakespearean tragedy than the fairytale portrayed in the title. Reflecting on the story itself and on the history of Puerto Rico, it is easy to discern several connections and analogies. Puerto Rico has never been able to establish its own identity fully as an independent country. It always had and still has a foreign identity imposed on it. The ideals of Puerto Ricans have never been fully allowed, but have always needed to be recognized. Both Spain and the United States used religion, Catholicism and Protestantism respectively, to accomplish their goals for Puerto Rico (Silén 102). María de los Angeles, representative of Puerto Rico, is striving for independence from her parents, Spain, to pursue her own goals. The United States entered the scene representing a false freedom from Puerto Rico's previous possessors (Silén 103). The part of the United States is played by Felisberto in the story, who, seemingly was the savior, but turned around and did not grant María de los Angeles (Puerto Rico) the freedom that she longed for. Puerto Rico is, to this day, in the stage of marriage to Felisberto. What will become of the unfinished story of Puerto Rico? Will it have the fairytale or the anti-fairytale ending?

Gender

María de los Angeles, like other Puerto Rican women, is "strong, persevering, achieving, ambitious, determined, and active" (Belén 52). But it is also true that Puerto Rican women are torn between the values of society and their own personal values and aspirations. The most important part of a female's life is to remain close to the family and to maintain her virginity. Compared to the other two female characters, María de los Angeles is stagnant in her life caused by the gridlocked powers in male society. Carmen Merengue, for instance, an acrobat and circus artist, decided to go against the rules of society and chose to be a performer instead of marriage or the church. Men are not a need for her and she lives free from male regulation. But this freedom does not come without hardship, because she is seen as a smutty woman and of lower class. This situation accurately reflects Puerto Rican society since women who choose to fight back against the norm and strive to achieve a life of their own are not looked upon with favor. On the other hand, Reverenda Madre Martínez, one of the Sisters at the catholic school, is the exact opposite of Carmen Merengue. She chose the church to escape the persecution of society. Her role in the novel brings a sense of God to earth. But despite her freedom from men, she is captured by the isolation of the body and heart. For María de los Angeles, dancing was not an option since a woman was not allowed to achieve goals in life without the help of a man. If she were to choose to stay an old maid and dance, she would be disowned by her family since that occupation would not be a respectable position for her high-class status. If she stayed with her parents and did not marry she would never dance. Joining the church to get away from her parents would not allow a career in the spotlight either. She chose to marry thinking that it would be the best way for her to continue dancing. Felisberto had promised her that she could keep dancing and she would not get pregnant. After the marriage, however, everything changes and she becomes pregnant and unable to dance. Choices

controlled by men have led her to ruin in the ballet world. This male dominance drives Felisberto to the need for a child. Since he cannot conquer his wife, he rapes her. Ferré's work does not begin with the opening phrase of "once upon a time" nor does it end with "they lived happily after," but putting aside those vast differences, the story she creates in the pages of the novel provides an interesting comparison of feminist views versus fairytales. Through our research, it was fascinating to discover the relationship between Ferré's tale and actual Puerto Rican women's lives. Ferré begins her account of La Bella Durmiente with various letters written to María de los Angeles' husband. Within the letters, an anonymous individual conceals the information that María is having an affair: The letters use of a pencil and her poor handwriting (she uses her left hand to scrawl the address) are extra-verbal signs that reinforce the impression that she is a woman of little education. Letters are frequent tools for seduction, but in this instance the two false letters are intended to seduce (lead astray) in a special way (Glenn 3). The scene is then yanked back to the article in which María de los Angeles is being commended for her excellent performance in ballet. María and the Princess of traditional fairytales are similar in that there is only one female child left to the Kingdom and finding a well-to-do man carries the success of the family fortune. In fairytales there are fairies. In this novel, there is Reverenda Madre that controls from afar using her powers from Heaven to influence María's life. María represents the cursed princess that must die and be revived by a man. Just like the Princess, María is held under the powerful spell of society that makes her "sleep" instead of pursue a career. When the Prince kisses the Princess to awaken her, María, also awakens alongside her man to the freedom from her parents and proposed ability to dance. Through a man, she is set free. In the storybooks, a Princess is like a beautiful Barbie Doll, another image that connects for Ferré. The dolls represent a symbol of women in society, meaning that like the dolls, women are quiet, beautiful to see, fragile and submissive and when one

is sick of playing with a doll, it is cast aside. This is used to represent taking away value from a person's being or the action of women being raped and stripped of any opportunities to better themselves at the hands of a male. The Princess in the fairytale did not ask to be married to the Prince. It was by his doing that she could come alive and live under him. Her considerations were not taken into account. María was stripped of her dreams when she unwillingly became pregnant and was forced into the role of a mother. Despite her pleading and wishes, the man's decision ended in the final action. In the beginning, it was said that there was not a connection to the "happily ever after," but after re-reading the death of María de los Angeles, one realizes that there is a freedom of living happily ever after. Through her death, María de los Angeles is given a chance to live. Granted, it is not the most ideal decision, but because of her intense hardship and oppression, she achieves freedom from it all, just like the Princess who marries her Prince and lives happily ever after.

***Bildungsroman* and Cultural Contexts**

According to Lukács, the theme of the novel of apprenticeship is the individual reconciliation between psychological and social forces, or between a person's interiority and "concrete social reality." Furthermore, this reconciliation "cannot and must not be the result of accommodation or of a harmony existing from the start," but rather it should be problematic and difficult (132). This is why a state of maturity is reached. Such maturity "comprehends and affirms the structures of social life as necessary forms of human community," yet, at the same time, these social structures are an occasion to actively express the protagonist's interiority (133). This type of writing "demands a balance between activity and contemplation, between wanting to mold the world and being purely receptive towards it" (133); it is a conscious and controlled process aimed at a certain goal. Lukács also contends that the protagonist of the novel of

apprenticeship or education "wants to realize [the protagonist's] deepest interiority in the outside world" (136), and that "[t]he social world must therefore be shown as a world of convention, which is partially open to penetration by living meaning" (137). It becomes clear that Lukács did not consider gender as a factor when he wrote about the *Bildungsroman*. The possibility of a reconciliation between individual and social forces presupposes a world which was conceived and shaped to satisfy male needs and desires. The necessary comprehension and affirmation of social structures can be seen as a trap that teaches women to accept the status quo without questioning its premises. Furthermore, this acceptance of the world as it is creates different expectations for men and women. By conquering and molding the world, men are to be admired and respected; women are simply not allowed to participate in this molding of the world. Thus, the real possibilities for women are already scheduled and they are to fulfill only one part of the transaction. In the balance between activity and contemplation, they are given the choice of contemplation; in the balance between molding the world and being purely receptive towards it, their choice has to be the latter. The attainment of a certain goal through a conscious and controlled process is, then, out of question, as it is the realization of their deepest interiority in the outside world. At the same time, the world of convention is rarely open for penetration by women since the nature of society is eminently patriarchal. According to this picture of society, women are to be admired and respected when they do not represent a threat to the established order. By the same token, they are most admired when they fulfill their own self-unrealization (my word). One of the avenues open for women to react against this state of affairs is transgression, which can take many forms, such as infidelity, prostitution, voluntary self-destruction and death.

The novel *La Bella Durmiente* is, in many ways, an interpretation of these concepts and structures. Ferré's use of letters, newspaper articles, the stream of consciousness technique, a photo album

with legends, a newborn card, work together in order to democratize the narration, in which the individual perspectives of the main characters are considered and expressed, as well as the outside view, the newspaper, which represents the Puerto Rican upper class. The whole narration is controlled by an omniscient narrator. The story is based on analogy and parallelism, and utilizes, as part of its cultural context, three ballets, a form of elitist art which represents the powerful class; and the movie "The Red Shoes," which is an expression of popular culture. These two cultural contexts are fictional expressions in the novel, created through the literary technique of hyp-narration. But there is also a third cultural context which shares the same ontological level of the main narration. It is the popular circus, in which an important character works as an acrobat. Her name is Carmen Merengue, the only person the protagonist, María de los Angeles, admires because Carmen represents everything she is not.

There are three movements or phases which provide the evolution of the story. The background of the first movement is the ballet "Coppelia," a French comic ballet. It tells the story of the villager Swanilda and her beloved Franz, who shows an interest in Coppelia without knowing that she is only a doll, a creation of the enigmatic doctor Coppelius. In order to attract Franz, Swanilda pretends to be Coppelia and interprets a very comic dance. The ballet concludes with a happy ending. In the novel, the protagonist, María de los Angeles, interprets the role of Coppelia. As Swanilda, she is jealous because Franz is interested in another woman. And for that reason, she destroys the doll and takes her place. She is now Coppelia, a doll. The highest moment of the ballet is her superb interpretation of a waltz, for which she makes a transgression of the role by breaking other dolls, smashing clocks, and making a strange noise with her mouth. The other dancers did not know what to do and they let Coppelia finish her act. Because of her extraordinary talent as a ballet dancer, the public loved her representation and the ballet was a success. María de los Angeles and her

vocation were one. After her success as a ballerina, she encounters immediate opposition from two sides, her Catholic school, which sees her involvement in ballet as indecent and dangerous for the soul and body; and her parents, who, in spite of recognizing her interest and talent in ballet, decide to prohibit her from dancing. At this moment, her father mentions the disgrace of having had a daughter and not a son because a woman is not able to manage the family fortune and she cannot continue the family name. Furthermore, he states that a woman is a jewel which a man should keep at home. This first movement ends with María de los Angeles becoming ill because she could not accept to be forbidden to dance. She is in a state of coma and has been sleeping for ten days and ten nights.

The second movement's background is the ballet "Sleeping Beauty," which is a dramatic ballet following the traditional fairytale by the same name. It tells the story of a wicked witch who condemns Aurora, the king's daughter, to live only until her sixteenth birthday. But the intervention of a fairy godmother saves Aurora from dying by making her sleep profoundly. One hundred years later, Prince Charming finds the princess in an abandoned castle, gives her a kiss and she wakes up. The ballet ends with their wedding. In the novel, through a stream of consciousness narration, we know about María de los Angeles' recovery in which she presents a version of the same fairytale with scenes depicting dream-like situations as well as nightmarish, feverish events. As a ballet dancer, she associates the story told by the ballet with the story of "The Red Shoes," a movie based on the fairytale by Hans Christian Andersen, in which the protagonist just loves to dance but she is punished because she abandons her home and church obligations. Her punishment was to dance until she would die. Because she could not take her red shoes off, the ones that made her dance, she had her feet taken off. María de los Angeles, fortunately for the time being, has a boyfriend, Felisberto, who takes care of her until she wakes up. Felisberto asks her to marry him, promising her that he will not prohibit her from dancing. The wedding is celebrated

with great luxuries, and apparently everyone is happy. For Fabiano and Elizabeth, the parents of María de los Angeles, the son-in-law, Felisberto, is ambitious enough to be able to make his own fortune. For Fabiano, the marriage is convenient because he can position himself in the upper class now. For María de los Angeles, the act of marrying represents a way to eliminate her prohibition to dance and the possibility to continue growing as an artist in her path towards her total self-realization. But the future is always uncertain, and María de los Angeles, up to this point, has experienced only a transference from her parents to her husband. The third movement's background is the tragic ballet "Gisselle," in which two men are in love with the peasant girl, Gisselle. One is the shepherd Hilarion, and the other is the peasant Loys, who in reality is a duke named Albrecht and who is engaged to princess Bathilde. Because of her weak heart, Gisselle is told by her mother not to dance, and Hilarion reveals to her the true identity of the duke. When she learns about Albrecht's deception, she becomes insane and dies. In the second act, Gisselle returns from death, and in company of the "willis" or ghosts of virgins who never married, in an act of revenge she kills both men. In the novel, María de los Angeles, through a narration using the stream of consciousness, tells the story of the ballet mixing the story proper with her own reality. This mixture turns the story into one of desperation and agony for not being able to control her own life, for not having the power to control her own body. In fact, she is raped and impregnated against her will by her husband, who breaks his commitment to let her dance and have a career in ballet, the only reason for being in the world for María de los Angeles. As usual, the newspaper covers all aspects of the wedding, which resembles those of fairytales, in luxury and a dream-like world. But ironically, this dream-like life turns into a nightmare for María de los Angeles and marks the beginning of her downfall.

Fabianito is born exactly nine months after the wedding. María de los Angeles, by the very fact of being a woman, is denied any decision-making power, first

from her parents, then from her school, and lastly from her husband. Society, because of its patriarchal nature, does not allow María de los Angeles the possibility of fulfilling her own goals, and does not offer her the chance to seek her self-realization. What it does offer her is the obligation to fulfill the needs and desires of others, against her will. That's why she looks for and finds ways to redeem herself through a transgression of the conventions of society, first by refusing to baptize her son, second by resuming her career as a dancer, and third by writing anonymous letters to her husband telling him that his wife is being unfaithful. In reality, she did want to be caught by her husband with another man, and she was. During the sexual act, there is an intensification of her transgression by praying to the Virgin Mary ("blessed be your purity," 194), but instead of giving her some type of consolation, her prayers act as an aphrodisiac, which functions as another de-mythification of conventional ideas, a common trend in writers of the so-called "post-boom" (those Spanish-American writers born circa 1940 and thereafter). María de los Angeles starts dancing and it does not matter to her anymore if she is a second- or third-rate ballerina. What was important for her was to follow her vocation, her love of dancing. It is at this point when she completely abandons herself to dancing and when her husband enters the room. The other man, acting in María de los Angeles' defense, smashes Fabiano's head by hitting it against the wall. At the same time, Fabiano fires his pistol and accidentally kills his wife. Fabiano dies after ten days in intensive care. María de los Angeles is buried in her wedding dress, and she "did not seem dead, but asleep, representing for the last time her role as Sleeping Beauty" (199). We know about María de los Angeles' last moments through a stream of consciousness narration which reveals two important things: 1) an ironic narration which makes a statement against motherhood: "kneel yourself in order to adore what you gave birth to you will adore him you will kiss him you will lick him you will protect him...now forget about being a ballerina forget about being you will

worship him" (200); and 2) the rationalization of her relationship with her husband, a man she will never forgive: "because I will not conform Felisberto because you betrayed me and that's why I brought you here in order for you to see me and in order for you to tell this to my father...neither protected nor sweet nor honorable nor tranquil...nor submissive nor conforming nor..." (201). From another point of view, we can take a closer look at the protagonist's insertion into society without giving up the possibility of her own self-realization. María de los Angeles' trajectory begins with a negative situation because she was born a female, a fact that makes her parents think that it was a disgrace and not a blessing for them to have a girl and not a boy. A girl is seen as a form of consolation for them. She is a jewel and that's why she must be protected by a true man. Puerto Rican upper class sees a female as a handicap and not as an asset for their interests. María de los Angeles is thus sent to a religious school so that she could have a good education and marry a good man. When María de los Angeles is attending school, a sort of tension is created between her parents, who want her to marry and have children, and the principal of the school, who wants her to be a nun. This way the school would be recruiting a disciple and at the same time securing the inheritance of a fortune since María de los Angeles is the only child. Neither her parents nor the school are preoccupied with what she wants. When, with the influence of the school, her parents finally decide to forbid her to dance, María de los Angeles does not give up her rights and vocation, and fights back by marrying with the proviso that she would continue her career as a ballerina. This escape from the parental home does not work because now she is imprisoned in the marital home. She is *forced* to become a wife and a mother. They are not *her* choices. She complains that the fact of being impregnated produces some changes in her body which will not allow her to become a first-rate ballerina. After giving birth, María de los Angeles again fights back and dances for the company her husband bought. The only thing is that he did not buy the

company to help his wife in her career, but because he saw it as an opportunity for making money. In a word, he was exploiting her. Furthermore, as a representative of the patriarchal society, he expresses that marriage is for him another way of doing business. María de los Angeles' last attempt to be free and become a ballerina is now an escape from marriage through infidelity, but the forces of society, allied with chance, do not let her have her way: she dies accidentally.

Contemporary feminist writing has been the witness of an increased emphasis of narratives of self-discovery. Unlike the male *Bildungsroman*, in the female version gender has become the main theme and it is the central problem in women's attempt to reconcile interiority and concrete social demands. This means that, in the female *Bildungsroman*, there has to be first an appropriation and then a reworking of this literary genre (Felski, 122). We have yet to see if Ferré's novel fulfills this important requirement. Some feminists rightly point out that in the *Bildungsroman*, "while male protagonists struggle to find a hospitable context in which to realize their aspirations, female protagonists must frequently struggle to voice any aspirations whatsoever" (Felski, 123). The whole array of social options become available only to men. Rita Felski, quoting Nancy Miller, reminds us that in the eighteenth century there existed the choice of two plots for females: "the 'euphoric,' in which the heroine "moves in her negotiation with the world of men and money from 'nothing' to 'all;' and the 'dysphoric,' which ends with the "heroine's death in the flower of her youth" (124). Felski also points out that in the nineteenth century the insufficiencies of this formula becomes more evident as the female protagonist has to choose between a "repressive marriage" or a form of withdrawal into inwardness which frequently concludes in "self-destruction" (124). Ferré's work shares important characteristics with this type of novel. Obeying societal forces, María de los Angeles marries not because she was in love with her husband but because she saw it as an opportunity to be able to dedicate her life to her vocation. It was not part of

the agreement to give a grandchild to her parents. It is important to note that neither sexuality nor love play an important role in María de los Angeles' search for a career of her own. In the traditional male *Bildungsroman*, the period of apprenticeship of the protagonist is typically that of childhood and early manhood, but the feminist *Bildungsroman* allows for a wider range of ages. If it is frequently "only after the experience of marriage that the heroine is able to see through and reject the seductive myth of romance as the key to female self-identity" (Felski 128), it is also partially true that María de los Angeles fulfills this requisite. Marriage for her was an excuse, a type of exchange in her struggle to retain the possibility to reconcile her desires with those of society. The only difference is that her reaction against the myth of romance came not after marriage but after motherhood. In fact, it is after giving birth to Fabianito that she rebels against her husband by way of infidelity, and against her son by not baptizing him and by almost abandoning him to caretakers. María de los Angeles conceives of infidelity as the last resort to free herself from the oppression of the marital home, thinking that her goal of becoming a ballerina was still attainable even though physical changes produced by motherhood left her the possibility of being only a mediocre dancer. Her act of infidelity must be seen, as Jane Gallop puts it, as "a feminist practice of undermining the Name-of-the-Father." Furthermore, "Infidelity is not outside the system of marriage, the symbolic, patriarchy, but hollows it out, ruins it, from within" (Gallop 71). In fact, this is exactly what María de los Angeles wanted to achieve. It was an act of revenge, not only against her husband, but also against society in general.

Clearly, María de los Angeles always wanted to become a successful ballerina. She was conscious that a dancing career was her first priority, the only activity that gave meaning to her life. The fact is that she died, but her death does not represent a failure on her part; on the contrary, this failure was imposed on her by both society and chance. Her death was not an act of self-destruction. She struggles to become

herself, but life makes her succumb; it forces her to be the Other, which is what society expects of her. The fact that she gives birth to a son can be seen, paradoxically, as a reward for her parents, who in the first place were disillusioned when she was born because they wanted not a girl, but a boy. Furthermore, her parents are not really mourning her death since, as they openly state in a letter, she was dead long before because of her rebellious acts against society. It is hoped that some of the ideas presented in this paper may provide a hint about the notion of the "appropriation" and "reworking" required by the female *Bildungsroman*. For sure, this novel provides a clear example of this reworking in a secondary character named Carmen Merengue, who, after experiencing a process of apprenticeship, makes the "right choice." Carmen, a circus artist and an acrobat, represents, in an almost mythical form, the ideal example of freedom and self-realization for María de los Angeles. Carmen is actually the only person she admires; she is the embodiment of the popular class. Even her name, Merengue, refers to a tropical and popular musical rhythm with African influence. Interestingly enough, Carmen fell in love with Fabiano, María de los Angeles' father, and for a time she renounced her career to become his mistress. But when Fabiano tried to prohibit her from having her own life, she made the choice of returning to the circus and abandoned him. The circle is complete; she is free again. Her vocation as an artist, or achieving her own self-realization is more important than romance. This is the reason why María de los Angeles felt a profound affinity with Carmen and struggled to follow her footsteps, which, for her, meant the separation from both the parental and the marital home. María de los Angeles did not live to accomplish this goal, but her resemblance to a tragic heroine makes us think that her physical death is transcended by her unbroken spirit. Her destruction is, literally and symbolically, also the destruction of the Father, represented by her dead husband. Her spirit lives on.

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