



Oblivion, rejection and marginalization in two plays of Mexican historical theater: *Felipe Ángeles* by Elena Garro and *El día más violento* by Bárbara Colio.

Olvido, rechazo y marginación en dos obras del teatro histórico mexicano: *Felipe Ángeles* de Elena Garro y *El día más violento* de Bárbara Colio.

DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxv. n80. 16b21

Ricardo Torres Miguel

Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana- Iztapalapa (MEXICO)

CE: ricksabato@gmail.com / ORCID: 0000-0001-9090-1416

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

Received: 31/03/2021

Reviewed: 14/05/2021

Accepted: 14/06/2021

ABSTRACT

Felipe Ángeles by Elena Garro and Bárbara Colio's *El día más violento* are two works that address somewhat dark characters in the history of the Mexican Revolution. Both pieces are about characters that have not been included in the worldview of the revolutionary nationalist apparatus, perhaps because they are women, as in the case of Colio's piece, or for daring to question the triumphs of that gesture, such as the piece on the hidalguense mythical General. Although there is a separation of more than 40 years, the writing of Garro and that of Colio weaves bridges, both in the feminine vision of mexican dramaturgy, and that of the historical heroes and who, despite being rejected, forgotten or marginalized characters, the theater has gradually offered them a little poetic justice.

Keywords: Mexican Revolution. historical memory. Carmen Serdán. Female writing.



RESUMEN

Felipe Ángeles de Elena Garro y *El día más violento* de Bárbara Colio son dos obras que abordan personajes un tanto oscuros en la historia de la Revolución mexicana. Ambas piezas versan sobre personajes que no han figurado en la cosmovisión del aparato nacionalista revolucionario, quizá por ser mujeres, como en el caso de la pieza de Colio, o por atreverse a poner en tela de juicio los triunfos de dicha gesta, como la pieza sobre el mítico general hidalguense. Aunque haya una separación de más de 40 años, la escritura de Garro y la de Colio teje puentes, tanto en la visión femenina de la dramaturgia mexicana, como en la de los héroes históricos y que, a pesar de ser personajes rechazados, olvidados o marginados, el teatro poco a poco les ha ofrecido un poco de justicia poética.

Palabras claves: Revolución mexicana. Memoria histórica. Carmen Serdán. Escritura femenina.

Comrades: the catastrophe is underway, angry eyes, the red hair of the air, nervous hands ready to knock on the doors of the homeland. Let us wait for her with serenity. She, although she brings death in her womb, is a proclamation of life, she is a herald of hope. It will destroy and create at the same time; it will tear down and build. Their fists are the formidable fists of the people in rebellion. It does not bring roses or caresses: it brings a (sic) axe and a tea.

Ricardo Flores Magón (2001). "To the Woman (Of *Regeneration*, September 24, 1910)".

Elena Garro (1916-1998) was one of the most outstanding novelists that Mexico has had, her narrative production stands out from her other interests, but it is necessary to say that she ventured into other arts such as dance, poetry (mostly unpublished), choreography, journalism and, above all, theater. The recent publication of *Teatro completo*, edited by the Fondo de Cultura Económica, allows us to see the great creative capacity that Garro possessed and, in addition, it verified his knowledge of various subjects, including the historical theater with *Felipe Ángeles*, which was published for the



first time in the magazine *Coátl*. The play about General Ángeles moved in the shadows for a long time, until it was mounted in 1978 by the UNAM, then followed by the edition of Patricia Rosas Lopátegui, *Teatro de Elena Garro*, in 1999. In that same year, within the XXVII Cervantino Festival, *Felipe Ángeles* was re-premiered at the Teatro Principal in Guanajuato, under the direction of Luis de Tavira. This production was also presented in Mexico City at the Julio Castillo Theater (Seydel, 2006, p. 106). In 2019, it was remounted in the Juan Moisés Calleja theater of the IMSS with the direction of Rodolfo Guerrero and for a short season (Rivera).

Bárbara Colio (1969) is one of the most important theatrical voices of recent years, in addition to her dramaturgical work, she is dedicated to teaching and theater criticism. He has a solid career with more than 20 published works, which have been staged in Mexico, the United States, Europe and South America. She has received several awards, among which the María Teresa León International Prize for Dramatic Authors 2004 (Spain) for her work *Pequeñas certezas*, the Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda National Dramaturgy Award 2009 for *You are here* and the Fine Arts Award, Baja California de Dramaturgia 2009 for her work *Cuerdas*. In 2017, for his career and perseverance in the performing arts, he won the Juan Ruiz de Alarcón award. In 2011, in conjunction with the National Theater Company of Mexico and the Jus publishing house, *El día más violento* (2011) was published, a work in which Colio touches on the theme of women in history with the character of Carmen Serdán, the famous poblana who was forgotten by history and who had to wait too long in the dark for her role in the revolt of 1910 to be recognized.

In such a way that *Felipe Ángeles* by Elena Garro (2016) and *El día más violento* by Bárbara Colio are two works that address somewhat dark characters in the history of the Mexican Revolution. Both pieces deal with characters who have not figured in the worldview of the revolutionary nationalist apparatus, perhaps because they are women, as in the case of colio's piece, or because they dare to question the triumphs of this feat, such as the piece over the mythical general of Hidalgo.

This text will analyze how, although there is a separation of more than 40 years, the writing of Garro and Colio weave bridges, both in the feminine vision of Mexican dramaturgy, and in that of



historical heroes and that, despite being rejected, forgotten or marginalized characters, the theater has gradually offered them a little poetic justice.

In the work of Elena Garro we enter one of the darkest episodes of the Mexican Revolution, where General Felipe Ángeles is assassinated by his co-religionists. Here the writer tells us the untold story, that of the betrayals, the secret pacts, the corruptions and above all the continuation of the tyrants who survived the revolt and worst of all, where they become the victors. Their history is, in the same way, that of the vanquished, that of the marginalized, of those who lost everything in the struggle, even their own lives. The playwright's version takes us into the deepest ideals of the revolutionary general, shows us his tears, his fears and his insecurities, as if he were the revolutionary general in his last hours.

As for Carmen Serdán, Bárbara Colio presents us with a possible fate of Achilles' older sister, after the events of the war. The author asks herself several questions such as what would have happened after the murder of her brothers and what was Carmen's true fate? In a kind of magical realism, the Mexicalense playwright explains how the revolutionary would have continued with her life, with her faults and her broken desires. We are exemplified, remarkably, how the Revolution did not do justice to all, since it made heroes to some and simply forgot others, either because they were women or, as the writer says, because they committed the sin of not dying young. *The most violent day*, as Colio says, is not historical, however, it perfectly represents the life of a woman that history had in the gloom for quite some time, and that the theater has been able today to give us a light of hope to know a little more about the first warrior of the Revolution.

The exercise of comparing two pieces, with more differences than similarities, lies in showing how the theater has been able to reflect history and social problems, even when there is a gap of more than 40 years between these works. The objective of this work will be to demonstrate that the theater of Elena Garro and that of Bárbara Colio starts from the same social budgets, that is, those that seek to combat the invisibility and injustice in which Serdán and Ángeles were for so long. The theatricality of both playwrights, although very different, evokes, inspires and recovers the past of these illustrious characters, brings them closer to us as spectators and builds a vision of the world



and at least on stage, the story is resemantized and retold or, rather, learned to tell. In this way, we have two works where it is about seeking recognition for the characters, either through historical data or through the fictional reconstruction of their lives. Both pieces present quite different structures, so we will begin by explaining the work of the Writer from Puebla.

Felipe Ángeles. Elena Garro

It is divided into three acts and is temporarily set at 24 hours, which presents us with a traditional Aristotelian scheme. It is a classic tragedy in its purest sense, the hero's path to his final destination is the main plot of the work. On the other hand, the piece does not make use of avant-garde resources such as absurdity or surrealism, present in many of Garro's works. Here, the approach is entirely realistic and is aimed at telling the agony of the revolutionary general. The story was born from a deep investigation made by Elena Garro, in which she was involved in the historical work of unraveling the mysteries coming from the archives of the Secretariat of National Defense (SEDENA). As a result of this, the work is tremendously reliable, Felipe Ángeles returns from his exile, is imprisoned and begins his ordeal for practically a whole day. The Theater of the Heroes of Chihuahua is the place where the facts take place, there it will serve as a prison and as the site of the sentence. Of course, the place indicates a metatheatrical mention, because as Jesus G. Master (2004) says:

The metatheater formally enhances the perception of the baroque concept of *theatrum mundi*. In this way it underlines the possible relationship between the world and the theatre, and fulfils an effective revealing intention of demystification, of social and political denunciation in some cases, and of expression, simply, in other cases, of certain dramatic and poetic conceptions (p. 3, 4).

In a kind of tragic fate, the theater is the last place where Angels will have to defend his honor and his life:

Escobar (*pointing to the theater*): Now I explain why we are going to judge him in a theater.

Diéguez(*serious*): What do you mean, General?



Escobar: Nothing! That I have a hard time learning the papers by heart...

Gomez Luna: There is no need to despair. We will make this farce emerge the truth and the government will have to retreat (Garro, 2016, p. 187, 191).

The metatheater has the function of evoking a supreme reality, of showing the viewer that what he sees has a further background, sometimes magical, and sometimes it is usually completely realistic and challenging of what is seen in the first instance:

By confronting, in a kind of game of mirrors, the spectators of her work *Felipe Ángeles* with the way of acting of the public during the trial, Elena Garro invites them to reflect on their own political commitment and on the question of whether they would actively intervene to prevent an injustice from being committed against a citizen or if they would prefer to resign themselves to whistling, applaud or shout, as well as settle for their role as spectators of repression against a political dissident, who has become the victim of the machinery of power (Seydel, 2006, p. 111).

And, according to Galván (1987), it is here that the revolutionary general is placed as a tragic hero: "Angels resembles Prometheus in the use of reason and not force, in the dissatisfaction of seeing that reason assists him, but he is powerless to sustain it and in his generosity for the desire to benefit humanity" (p. 30). There is an excerpt from the judgment of General Ángeles reproduced by Osorio (2008), which could be very similar to what Galván said a few lines ago: "-I know that I am going to die, but my death will do more good than my actions during my life, because the blood of the martyrs fertilizes the soil where ideals sprout" (p. 180). It is from this heroic facet of the revolutionary that Garro builds his work. The passionate and idealistic version of the general is what makes the writer position her worldview on this tragedy. In addition, the playwright elaborates the character to make use of *the elocutio* to show several *exempla* that seek to persuade and convince their opponents, not of their innocence, but of the value of the Revolution.

The use of classical rhetoric in this work is clear, so a clear lyricism in the words of the general is remarkable:



His defense is energetic and virile, but at the same time reveals a somewhat androgynous, sensible, reasonable and meek personality, who offers no resistance when apprehended, who sobs at the thought that posterity will judge him as a fool. The author contrasts it with Obregón's machismo: the one who shoots them all. (Galván, 1987, p. 30).

It is here that another of the traits of the tragic hero appears: sacrifice.

The only thing I stand for right now is my actions. Jurors, when you voted for the death penalty and I have disappeared, my only wish is that it will not be said that I was a bad man. (Osorio, 2008, p. 191).

Ángeles feels defeated and knows that despite all his effort and that of the lawyers and the ladies, he will be shot because the "first boss" has already decided. "Ms. Revilla: We ask for a legal trial. Time, defenders, or the suspension of the trial, since it has been declared illegal by the justice of the Union" (Garro, 2016, p. 184). Therefore, somehow, he enjoys his moment and savors his anticipated triumph, because the victory of honor for the hero no tyrant can take it away. "Felipe Ángeles, in the eyes of Garro, survives the shooting thanks to the word said. There is a longing for eternity in his invocation, knowing that there is only that which has a name" (Olguín, 2011, p. 191).

Of course, this lyricism that is shown in the dialogues of the condemned is not gratuitous, in the speech of General Felipe Ángeles, which Garro reproduces in his work, various stylistic and semantic functions of the first person of the singular are used, as is the case of showing the desire to resist and be a martyr in the face of the maelstrom that is coming:

I wrote the telegram that crossed Carranza's face like a fuss. For *me* we went to Zacatecas and finally beat Huerta. I am to blame for the fact that, ignoring Carranza's despotic mandates, we have gone to give the last death blow to the Huertistas. I am guilty of having told Carranza his moral misery, his envy, his lack of patriotism, his ambition, his despotism (Garro, 2016, p. 177).¹

¹ Italics are mine.



This repeated use of the personal pronoun demonstrates the enormous sacrifice the general makes, but this also means pondering the leading role of Angels in the face of the injustice that was being committed towards him and the cause he pursued.

Most of the criticism around *Felipe Ángeles* has seen the work as a kind of ancestral rite, where the Aztec hero, victorious of the flowery wars, returns to fulfill his cycle, his final destination: sacrifice. This *leitmotiv* of criticism is pertinent because, indeed, the character seems to follow a circle towards tragedy, assumes it and proudly raises his brand, his stigma as a victim of a disastrous destiny. In the work, the general remains stoic and at the moment quite negative (according to Garro's characterization), knowing that forgiveness will not come and that if it arrives it will be late.

Angels: The death of a man, a lawyer, is something determined before his birth.

Lopez Hermosa: I don't accept your reasons for dying, General.

Angels: The secret destinies of death no one knows. Moreover, death is the only private privilege I accept... each dies of his own death(*Angels laughs.*) (Garro, 2016, p. 194).

This emotional charge, which occurs throughout the work, is what enhances the character's discourse. For Garro, the power of the general's words resonates louder than the bullets, which in the end will end his life.

What Elena Garro does in this work is to continue the lesson that the hero brought on his return, to change the sword for the word and for ideas and to propose reason, intelligence and civilization in society. The author then, based on a historical fact, has chosen a character that had been forgotten and has made him reborn based on his human, ethical and intellectual characteristics and presents him as a character at the same time as virile, somewhat androgynous, very different from the stereotypical character (sic) revolutionary (Galván, 1987, p. 34).

This humanist base is what sustains the character of Garro, without being religious, Angels tries to persuade his audience through fraternity and love for human beings. This is also how Osorio puts it:



"He ended up, finally, like St. Francis of Assisi, for declaring his love for animals and all things: for the landscapes of his land, for the planetary system, for the nebula that tends through the immense ocean, for the stars, for everything... And all this, expressed in the midst of an impressive silence" (p. 191). This shows that, in a vain effort to empathize with his executioners, the general, in real life, tried to lengthen his end as much as possible. In Garro's work, Ángeles is tired, he has the hopes of Mrs. Revilla and her lawyers, but at the same time he embraces the idea of being a martyr, that his sacrifice is worthwhile:

Angels: No one escapes, Bautista. Flight is an illusion and in this case I don't think it's worth the risk.

Bautista: There is no risk, general. All the generals of the War Council left Chihuahua today. Only Escobar was left... I don't know what that would stay for, but it's the least of it. I am in charge of shooting him. My head depends on yours. See, General? Unintentionally, we swing from it above death. And I want to run it with you!

Angels: You are the only one who runs it, Bautista, my life is already lost (Garro, 2016, p. 226).

Bautista offers him the easy way out, the one that anyone would have taken in order to safeguard life, however, Ángeles prefers early death, the one that gives him the ideals of the army, the one that assures him that his honor will remain intact and the one that gives him, finally, the victory over the despot (Seydel, 2010, p. 85).

This vision of good and bad, heroes and antiheroes is what Elena Garro is interested in proposing. The Manichaeist vision is such that the playwright omits one of the central points of the trial of Felipe Ángeles, that is, his link with Francisco Villa.

The prosecutor's questions electrified the audience because they were at the heart of the matter. Víctores Prieto wanted Ángeles to condemn Villa and deny the legitimacy of his armed struggle. Ángeles immediately understood the importance of his response and, needing a little time to meditate on it, tried to avoid it (Osorio, 2008, p. 181).



Garro's portrayal of Ángeles prefers to focus on the ideological character of the character rather than the historical one, since the human and heroic virtues of the general stand out in style at the expense of everything, including his own sentimental interests, such as his children and his wife. The work seeks to show the hypocrisy of politicians and the ambition of power, contrasting them with the love of the country and the ideals of Felipe Ángeles.

Coming from this idealistic and sonorous aspect of the human virtues of the revolutionary, specialized criticism has not paid enough attention to the character of Mrs. Revilla and other women who fight for the truth and to save the general.

In a post-revolutionary environment in which the destinies of society belong to the male sphere, the female presence of the author is filtered with a character who is her *alter ego* in the work, Mrs. Revilla, and two other women who promote the legal defense of the hero because these characters have a clearer concept of justice than the revolutionaries (Galván, 1987, p. 35).

The vision of the Mexican woman dedicated to the ideals of a just cause and the demystification of the classic patriarchal machismo of the literature of the Revolution is only one of the high values in Garro's work. "In any case, the contribution and the historical account made by Elena Garro is inscribed, as in the case of Nellie Campobello, in that preserve of the narrative, whether historical, or fictional, about the Mexican Revolution, considered masculine in exclusivity" (Prado, 2006, p. 99). This feminine vision is also one of the attributes that the criticism around *Felipe Ángeles* has overlooked. This is how we see it almost at the end of the work, when the dialogue between Mrs. Revilla and the general takes place:

Angels: [...] I have a hard time not crying about myself. Don't cry about Clara, my wife, about my children... They better not have been allowed to cross the border. In his presence it would have been impossible for me to die.

Mrs. Revilla. Cry, general... (Garro, 2016, p. 238).



In the scene, the general finally *breaks down* emotionally and shows us his more human side, in which he separates himself from the military and offers the man dejected by the unreason of a rigged and unfair trial. The presence of Mrs. Revilla is, as Galván says, Garro's *alter ego*, who comforts and gives the revolutionary the ultimate comfort. This last part is important, because as Gloria Prado says, the woman's gaze that the playwright imprints on events of a highly controversial nature, is one of the little analyzed characteristics of historical theater, which as will be seen later, relate her to other writers who have set their sights on this type of issue.

Elena Garro did not live the Mexican Revolution, she was born in 1916 and was only five years old when it can be considered that she concluded, but her inquiries in the historical archives, the family accounts of those who did take part in the conflict and the processing she made of them, coupled with her capacity to configure characters, environments, times and spaces, they lead her to generate these "biographical reports" in which she reflects and gives them new life, from a woman's own perspective, a very special woman, who expresses her convictions, her preferences and inscriptions, fifty years after the beginning of historical events (Prado, 2006, p. 99, 100).

The representation of the trial of Felipe Ángeles does justice in its own way, by telling us his story, because he is one of many characters little disseminated by the official institutional apparatus until a few years ago. Today, more than fifty years after this magnificent work was created, it is commendable to realize the whole wide range of qualities that this piece still holds. Currently, over the years and new historical approaches, the character of Felipe Ángeles has enjoyed a certain popularity and has left, for the moment, his ambiguity as a "annoying" individual for certain sectors in government power. However, Garro's work was ahead of ideological positions where the historical rescue of General Ángeles suited them, and presented a daring and challenging piece for the regimes of his time:

Both Garro and Ibarguengoitia, both disciples of Rodolfo Usigli, were uncomfortable writers, since they expressed their political opinions without hesitation and in their sharp criticism of the generals who emerged victorious from the Revolution, they abandoned the



solemn discourse and showed all the sinister mechanisms that characterized the accommodations and rearrangements of the victorious politicians and military (Seydel, 2006, p. 107).

As has been seen, the official story usually commits omissions, forgetfulness or even rejection to mention some characters uncomfortable for power. The case of Felipe Ángeles has gradually resonated more, and perhaps, he is no longer that unknown individual of the Mexican Revolution and on the contrary, he can become a character of some popularity.

***The most violent day.* Barbara Colio**

Something similar has happened with Carmen, the eldest of the Serdán brothers (although without the current fame of Ángeles), who together with Aquiles began the revolutionary deed, back on November 18, 1910. Like the General of Hidalgo, the brave revolutionary has been seen under two perspectives, first as a co-participant in the events of Santa Clara, number 4 and then as an unknown who:

[...] surviving for 38 more years, she was left alone, at the head of a family of widowed women and orphaned children, testifying to the ingratitude of a social movement to which she gave her life and who never remembered her again. It wasn't something they decided. This was decided by the Revolution (Colio, 2011, p. 16).

However, as in the case of the other work in this work, today dramatic fiction can give us a little light in the dark. *The most violent day* is a very recent play by the young playwright Bárbara Colio where, as already said, an attempt is made to reconstruct the historical memory of a woman until today little studied.

It is a fictional story where we see the protagonist, Carmen Serdán, in her different stages of her life and death. The work emphasizes showing us the reconstruction of Serdán's life, after the fatal events of November 18, 1910, where she lost practically her entire family, including the famous



Achilles. Therefore, we see the character transit between the past, the present and the future. With this, the piece provides data about Carmen's mysterious life, such as, for example, the famous interview with Carranza and his request for her to intercede with Zapata to iron out "rough edges". We also observed her dedication in hospitals when she was serving as a nurse, to finally meet the old heroine. Here, the work concentrates on the imagination to pose a tired protagonist and suspicious of the scope and triumphs of the Revolution.

The play consists of a single act and ten scenes. It covers an extensive temporality between the years of 1910, 1915, 1948 and the present. The space is also diffuse, because it will be superimposed, as if what we saw was a dream. Unlike *Felipe Ángeles*, this piece does not use the Aristotelian approach, but rather uses an anachronistic time and spaces where events go through different regressions or even some anticipations. So we can experience certain analepsis or prolepsis, as the case may be. It is a surreal approach, where the characters move between several overlapping spaces, as if they were scaffolding, and where their life wanders through imaginary spaces, some are represented by memory, desire or death.

However, this type of theatricality does not make the work confusing, but causes the viewer or reader to be even more interested in what happens with Carmen Serdán. For example, in scene zero, where we see an old Carmen breaking an envelope, then immediately after, we see a dead Carmen, who will be like a kind of guide who takes us by the hand to know the life of the protagonist. Also, this piece does not have as many characters as Garro's, in fact, it could be said that the three women we identify as Carmen, along with Achilles, are the most important. A factor in understanding the meaning of this story is the idea of introducing three profiles with the different stages of Carmen's life, which will give the appearance of a durability; on the other hand, we see Achilles always young, as if time had stopped and history had made him eternal.

As already noted, the work uses analepsis and prolepsis, through which we see the main character in different circumstances, even speaking to us from death, in the future. Then we jump into a painting from the past, in which there is an old Carmen and then a young woman; with this, we



obtain information from before the events of November 18 and later we know the bitterness and uneasiness of oblivion, typical of the present time.

Architect: Is it... any relatives of Achilles Serdan?

Carmen Vieja: Her older sister.

Architect: But if that whole family... what weren't there...?

Carmen Vieja: Dead? Yes. Several high school books say that. And what I die of is laughter. Don't worry. It's okay for some to believe I'm already dying. Sometimes I believe it too (Colio, 2011, p. 32).

This quote shows us one of the main arguments of this work, are the circumstances of the war, the nationalist and patriarchal apparatus or history the ones that forget? All these premises may be true, but the data collected indicate that we find an idea of selective history, which makes some heroes and others, simply condemns them to marginalization. This has been investigated lately, such is the case of María Teresa Martínez Ortiz (2010), who states:

The myth of the popular soldier, such as "La Adelita" or "La Valentina," aspires to contain the collective female revolutionary experience, without considering essential notions such as race and/or social class. While there are countless caudillos such as Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, etc., women's participation has remained invisible due to the suppressive archetype of the soldadera (p. 45).

Although this is true, in the newspaper *Regeneración* of September 24, 1910, that is, a little less than two months after the event in Puebla, a call was made to the woman to take up arms and go to the revolt:

Comrades: this is the dreadful picture offered by modern societies. From this picture you see that men and women alike suffer the tyranny of a political and social environment that is in complete disagreement with the progress of civilization and the conquests of philosophy. In times of anguish, stop raising your beautiful eyes to heaven; there are those who have



contributed most to making you the eternal slaves. The remedy is here, on Earth, and it is rebellion (Flores, 2001, p. 34).

Of course, this does not deny the previous note, in fact, it confirms it, since very early in the deed there was the concern to integrate women into the movement, not only as companions of men, but as assets within the struggle. This is what Martínez refers to, because in his opinion:

Symbolically, Carmen Serdán must be considered the first warrior of the Mexican Revolution. In Puebla, together with her brothers Aquiles and Máximo, Carmen embraced arms to fight for the revolutionary cause out of her own conviction (2010, p. 48).

This is one of the main criticisms projected by Colio's text, since it is verified how the victors of the Revolution did not take back the first promoters of the revolt, as in the case of Carmen, but left them in oblivion. In addition, here lies another of the importances of *The Most Violent Day*, reconstructing the life and work of Carmen Serdán is relevant because it sheds new light on transcendental women within the armed revolt, memories that had remained buried or abandoned. Therefore, the work helps to avoid the ostracism with which the heroine has been treated: "The biography of Carmen Serdán is unique because it is full of discrepancies and mystery. There are so many significant gaps in his life that only a quality documentary historical fiction could fill them successfully" (Martínez, 2010, p. 47). And for that reason, *The most violent day* takes on significance, because it fills gaps and covers possible doubts, but above all it clarifies one thing, Carmen's story is as important or perhaps more than that of her brother. This is a stray bullet thrown by the playwright. Is it a sin to die young, did only men earn their eternity on revolutionary Olympus? The work clears these and other variants by subjecting revolutionary events to the critical judgment of today:

Architect: It has been a real pleasure to meet a heroine.

Old Carmen: Heroes die. Young people.

Architect:... Guess...

Architect: Well, for history. You know it very well, this country has gone through too much and we need *things*, visible, huge, to remember them.



Carmen Vieja: Her name is written on a bronze plaque, architect, I saw her here. It was just because of that [...]

Achilles: Wow, what a mania yours to live. And what happened?

Carmen Vieja: Of what?

Achilles: With the Revolution.

Carmen Vieja: Under construction, brother. With scaffolding. Still (Colio, 2011, p. 33, 78).

This part is the most insistent position in the work, since the achievements of the revolutionary deed are submitted to the judgment of time. The author uses the theatrical strategy of scaffolding, a vital part of the theater today and without which there would be practically no stage. The metaphor of scaffolding works perfectly to understand which part was left under construction within the great stage that projected the revolt begun in 1910, as is the case of economic inequality or discrimination, themes mentioned in the work: "to the dramatic structure of *The most violent day* I decided to call scaffolding. Because it happens in a country like ours, in eternal construction" (p. 97).

Colio's piece recreates several passages from Carmen Serdán's life, including her early war activities, such as the manufacture of homemade bombs:

Mom's Voice: You won't be playing with fire. Right, Carmencita?

Carmen Joven: No mom. I'm making you some sweets.

Mom's Voice: Oh daughter, you cannot deny the cross of your parish.

Cooking like the good lady from Puebla that you are.

Carmen Joven: I am. (*Finishes his bomb, contemplates it*)

Mom's Voice: It's almost time to go to Mass. Don't delay. (*Moves away*)

Carmen Joven: (*Santigua his creation*) Amen.

(*Murmur*) Long live the Revolution (p. 27).

Likewise, the piece recreates the duality between religious and rebellious of the Mexican warrior, on the one hand, she was a faithful believer and, on the other, she had firm ideals about the nascent revolutionary movement:



At an almost impossible time for a middle-class lady, Carmen and other women were part of the anti-re-election club "Luz y Progreso" (Light and Progress), long before the Revolution began. All of them accumulated weapons and made bombs, practiced espionage, and conducted secret meetings inside the church, they also used different pseudonyms, Carmen's was a male one: "Marcos Serrato" (Martínez, 2010, p. 48).

These notes attest to the warrior will of the character, vindicate him and show him before our eyes as a complex woman, of high religious values, as a daughter of a family, as an excellent sister and with an ideological conscience as important or more than his brothers. However, for Martínez-Ortiz the commitment of male historical criticism to want to highlight the myths of the soldaderas, for example, the *Adelita* or the *Valentina*, have obfuscated the image of Carmen and other women, who have been condemned to oblivion.

Carmen not only anticipates, but gives herself to the cause. He didn't die, but he could have died. Paradoxically, despite having been the most exposed, on the balconies, the roof, the patios, the corridors and the door open to Cabrera, she did not die and was barely injured... But... let us accept that Carmen was two steps away from death and that the one who has not fallen does not detract one iota from her generous dedication (Mendieta Alatorre, 1971, quoted by Martínez, 2010, p. 52).

However, in *The Most Violent Day* the protagonist herself is frustrated with her fate. Her life took a turn after the events of November 18, but these events left her alone, with no apparent goal or guideline in her path. This is what Carmen Vieja says, when she remembers the talks with her brother:

Carmen Vieja: Hearing you talk like that fed me more than anything, Achilles. I felt like my heart was beating like a bomb, and that there was nothing more important in the world than standing up for your ideas with my life. I did it. I did it. And I would do it again [...]

Carmen Vieja: I wanted a free country, the one you told me, I wanted it with rage (Colio, 2011, p. 40, 42).



In the current time of the work, Carmen has become an old woman, still retaining her critical acuity, but has lost faith in social movements. She thinks that her time is up or must have run out when her brother was killed, when she was denied the glory of defending her ideals, when luck decided to leave her alive. However, he remembers his youth and his commitment to the cause, even after the death of his brothers. For example, when she remembers her stay as a nurse. Here, the piece becomes quite experimental and allegorical, Carmen observes the dying patient, who is Mexico, and who is in danger in the hands of a bad doctor, played by Huerta. In another scene, the wounded (the people of Mexico) die without knowing that their children, in the future, will prefer to leave the country to try their luck with another language and another culture, and will see the Revolution in a documentary, without knowing its past or its history.

In the next scene, Carmen goes to see Zapata at Carranza's request to deliver a letter asking him to lay down his arms. He does not receive it, in the end the Carrancistas and the Zapatistas kill each other. Everything has been like a dream, again Carmen Vieja remembers everything as her past. Although Colio's perspective is a postmodern theatricality with surreal touches, the writer ventures to mention the little-known and proven passages of the Mexican warrior, such as the case of her passage through the care of the sick or the incursion as a messenger towards the Zapatista hosts. Despite not being a work, entirely historical, *The Most Violent Day* recovers practically forgotten or null passages in the historiography about Carmen. Another thing that Colio does with his interpretation is to vindicate and dignify the history about the illustrious poblana, this unlike some part of the official history, which has preferred to stay only in the events of November 18. In addition, as Martínez-Ortiz mentions: "The powerful presence of the heroic poblana surpasses the dominant cultural archetype by problematizing and questioning the simplistic, but common traditional representation of women on the battlefield." (p. 54). This is another of the readings that Carmen



Serdán's story requires, the gender vision,² which Bárbara Colio shows well, not only in the configuration of her characters, but in the mentality of the protagonist:

Architect: See, its height is greater than that of any similar building in Latin America and—

Carmen Vieja: I've never understood that obsession of men.

Architect: Which one?

Carmen Vieja: To say that yours is always the greatest (Colio, 2011, p. 28).

Colio's work feeds the interest in rescuing these figures, until today somewhat diffuse of the Mexican Revolution. Through dramatic fiction, interest in these women is stimulated, an issue that, unlike the male caudillos (Villa or Zapata), has not been analyzed with deep interest. As in the case of *Felipe Ángeles*, Colio's work concludes with a certain halo of bitterness about the results of the Revolution and its effects on its heroes. This is mentioned by the author of *The Most Violent Day* herself:

The Revolution turned out to be precisely a series of great steps taken; too many backwards and others sadly lost: such as the step to a real distribution of land, the step to non-discrimination, the step to each of the Mexicans having social security, education, a roof, work (p. 97).

It is evident that the marginalization suffered by these characters is different, the first, Felipe Ángeles, was due more to political issues and Carmen Serdán was more for reasons of gender discrimination, an issue that fortunately today has been changing and Serdán has been recognized as the author of the first shot, with which the revolutionary deed of 1910 began.

In these works operates a fateful destiny, that of Angels is the classic tragedy, the fate of the hero, the sacrifice that comes as a balm before the imminent death. In this dialogue, the general's bitterness in the face of the adverse outcome of the revolutionary events creeps in. For the sentenced, the defeat implied by his murder is a minor thing compared to the failure of the revolt. A

² As it is not one of the primary objectives of this work, this topic will not be exploited here.



matter that, once again, confirms the desire to put life before ideals. This was shown by the stoicism of General Ángeles:

Angels: Not lost. I didn't play to lose, or to win. I fought for principles. What you call triumph, for me is a defeat. My death is one more defeat of the Revolution, a defeat of you who kill me... (Garro, 2016, p. 234).

In Carmen's case, it gives the appearance that her destiny was stolen, she also longed for sacrifice, young death, the prize for warriors who give their lives to have a better future. However, this did not happen, and this makes his story even more tragic, for he is denied the virtue of eternity.

Carmen Joven: You said until the end.

Carmen Vieja: That day! I wanted to die day in combat! I asked you, damn you!

Achilles: I'm going to hide in the basement.

Carmen Vieja: And you left me alone.

Carmen Joven: No. Promise me we'll see each other again.

Achilles (Gives him a kiss on the forehead) You won't be hurt...

Carmen Vieja: Yes, they did. They left me alive (Colio, p. 44).

Historical memory is one of the main issues of these works, since one of the interests of Garro and Colio is to build a memory that dignifies and recovers illustrious little-known characters, without stigmatizing or belittling them as has happened with Carmen Serdán and Felipe Ángeles. The vision of a selective and dishonest history is one of the main premises shared by both playwrights and, although it may sound anachronistic, the intention is to build a story that gives its place to each one, without having to be passed through the filter of political expediency or patriarchal structures that undermine the merits of illustrious heroines.

And that is why it becomes relevant to compare the historical theater that has been made in Mexico, because it places the dead heroes on the stage, resurrects them and gives them a value, sometimes different from what the official history had given them. This kind of representation gives us back hope that the right story is real, at least it's scene. In the story of Elena Garro, General Ángeles



transcends and survives injustice through dying with his ideals intact. In the work of Bárbara Colio, Carmen Serdán returns to fight the federals, but this time she dies with Aquiles, they leave together as, perhaps, they were promised once.

What is the allusion that these works carry? How do they relate despite being written so many years apart? *Felipe Ángeles* and *El día más violento* are two pieces that recover a dark past, with somber and challenging characters for power, whether political or patriarchal, which in the end could be the same. The feminine vision of Garro and Colio allows us to know the unknown facets of the characters and that we can understand a more human and honest profile of the actors of Mexican history. Elena Garro, with her work, gives Felipe Ángeles the notoriety that the political situation of those times took away from him, but it also gives him a more human, more real aspect, because as has been said throughout this work, the author eliminates from her characters the prevailing and prototypical masculinity that used to be projected on revolutionary men. Garro, with this demystifying approach to the recalcitrant manhood of the time, is ahead of his time and gives us a flesh and blood general who cries in the face of adversity and injustice. Likewise, Bárbara Colio criticizes the myth of the secondary participation of women in the Revolution with her courageous and dedicated vision of Carmen Serdán. In her story, Carmen is the leader, the protagonist who revolts against the image we were given of her in the history books. Colio's version is the fictional reconstruction of the possible fate that the Puebla heroine may have had, but it is also the female perspective in which the story can be told, where women are not denied importance and given the just value they deserve. Therefore, both works, although they have been written with so much time between them, are united by a mission to tell the unspoken story, which sometimes you do not want to hear.

References

- Colio, B (2011). *The most violent day*. Mexico, Jus: National Theater Company.
- Flores, R. (2001). To the Woman (From Regeneration, September 24, 1910). En: *The Mexican Revolution*. Mexico: Editores Mexicanos Unidos.



- Galván, D.(1987). *Felipe Ángeles* de Elena Garro: heroic sacrifice. *Latin American Theatre Review*, 20(2), 30-33.
- Garro, E. (2016). Felipe Ángeles. In J. Garro and G. Schmidhuber (Pról.), Álvaro Álvarez Delgado (Ed.), *Teatro completo* (pp. 177-244). Mexico: FCE.
- Maestro, J. G.(2004). Cervantes and Shakespeare: The birth of metatheatrical literature. *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 81(4-5), 599-612. <https://es.scribd.com/doc/86312840/Cervantes-y-Shakespeare-El-Nacimiento-de-La-Literatura-Metateatral>
- Martínez-Ortiz, M. T. (2010). Carmen Serdán: the historical invisibility of the warriors of the Mexican Revolution against the cultural representations of the myth of the soldadera. *Graffylia. Journal of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters*, 7(11-12), 44-57.
- Prado, G. (2006). Revolutionary avatars: Elena Garro and her re: tale of history. In L. E. Gutiérrez de Velasco and G. Prado (Eds.), *Elena Garro. Memory and future of a scripture* (pp. 87-104). Toluca, Mexico: Tecnológico de Monterrey, Toluca campus/ Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City/ Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes.
- Olgúin, D. (2011). A solid theater: Elena Garro. In C. Gidi and J. Bixler (Coords.), *Las mujeres y la dramaturgia mexicana del siglo XX*. Mexico, Ediciones El Milagro/Universidad Veracruzana/Universidad de Sonora/Virginia Tech University.
- Osorio, R. (2008). General Felipe Ángeles: Court martial and execution. In A. Gilly (Comp.), *Felipe Ángeles en la Revolución*. Mexico: Era/National Council for Culture and the Arts.
- Rivera, N.(November 28, 2019). Felipe Ángeles,by Elena Garro, reopens the Teatro Reforma. [Electronic version]. *Process*. <https://www.proceso.com.mx/cultura/2019/11/28/felipe-angeles-de-elena-garro-reinaugura-el-teatro-reforma-234986.html>
- Seydel, U. (2010). Felipe Ángeles: the vindication of the sovereignty of the Self. *Literatura Mexicana*, 21(2), 75-90.
- Seydel, U. (2006). The staging of power in Felipe Ángeles. In L. E. Gutiérrez de Velasco and G. Prado (Eds.), *Elena Garro. Memory and future of a scripture*. Toluca, Mexico: Tecnológico de



Monterrey, Toluca campus/ Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City/ Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes.