

A Unique, Disquieting and Polemical Writer

Elena Garro
(1917-1998)



Luis Humberto González/SILVA

After her death, Elena Garro's words have renewed power and poetry. In life, she always considered herself a woman unrecognized in Mexican intellectual circles, possibly because of her break-up with Octavio Paz and her resulting self-imposed exile, or perhaps because of her controversial opinions about Mexican politics—particularly when she fought openly with the 1968 student movement leaders—or because of the polemical, explosive, tormented personality she built, or because she was a different kind of woman, who liked cats, tap dancing and had discovered early in life the pleasures of writing.

Without a doubt, Elena Garro is one of the most important Mexican women writers of the twentieth century. Rafael Tovar y de Teresa, the president of the National Council for Culture and the Arts, said at her funeral, "Mexico has lost its most important contemporary woman writer." Other writers and dramatists made similar comments, recognizing in her a unique, disquieting and original writer.

Elena Garro lived out her last days in Cuernavaca, Morelos, practically immobilized in an armchair where

she had to sleep because her emphysema allowed for no changes of position. She had not always led such a sedentary life. She was very active and her complete works are vast. She was a passionate woman, who had two known loves: she married Octavio Paz at the age of 20 and had a love affair with Argentinian writer Adolfo Bioy Casares, whom she left after watching him buy some very expensive shirts, one after another, and thinking that they would undoubtedly look better on Paz, who was still her husband. She traveled tirelessly and constantly changed addresses, living in the United States, Spain and France.

Garro was born in the city of Puebla in 1917. She obtained her Masters degree in literature and was the choreographer of the UNAM theater, managed by Julio Bracho. She worked as a journalist in Mexico, the United States and Europe and as a script writer. Her plays, like *La señora en su balcón* (The Lady on Her Balcony), have been translated and staged abroad, as have her books of prose. Her first and most important novel, *Los recuerdos del porvenir* (Memories of the Future), which won the Villaurrutia Prize in 1963, was adapted for film. Her *Felipe Angeles* (1979) has been described as the most important play written about the Mexican Revolution.

Among her many works are two books of short stories, *La semana de colores* (The Week of Colors) and *Andamos huyendo Lola* (We're Running Away, Lola), and a vast number of short stories written for periodicals collected in more than 19 anthologies, as well as many plays, including, to name a few, *Un hogar sólido y otras piezas en un acto* (A Solid Home and Other One Act Plays), *El árbol* (The Tree) and *El rey mago* (The Wise Man). She also published many essays in magazines, such as "En contra de una escandalosa novela" ("Against a Scandalous Novel"), about Carlos Fuentes' *La región más transparente* (The Most Transparent Region), and "Roberto Fernández Retamar, poeta entrevisto e imprevisto" (Roberto Fernández Retamar, A Glimpse of an Unexpected Poet). Elena Garro died in her sleep, as she had wanted to. She was practically alone, accompanied only by her 16 playful cats and her daughter Helena Paz, her constant companion. ■■

Astrid Velasco Montante
Staff writer