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CHARACTONYMS IN STORIES OF THE PREGNANT BEE

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Cuentos de la abeja encinta (Stories of the Pregnant Bee) is Marigloria Palma's first collection of short stories published in 1975. This Puerto Rican author begins her literary career as so many other women authors in Latin America, by writing poetry. Born María Gloria Pagan in 1921, she adopted the pseudonym Marigloria Palma for her first poems which appeared in the late 1930's and early forties in literary magazines such as Puerto Rico Ilustrado and Alma Latina and in the well-known Puerto Rican dailies El Mundo and El Imparcial.

Marigloria Palma is recognized by her peers as a lyric poet with her first book of poetry Agua Suelta (Running Water) in 1942.¹ She was honored with a prize from the Institute of Literature for this volume. At this time she was also invited to join the Ateneo Puertorriqueño, a cultural and literary association. This was quite an honor for a budding artist of 21 years of age. Her poetic vein gives fruit to many more volumes of poetry such as Voz de lo transparente, Canto de los olvidos, Arboles míos, and San Juan entre dos azules.

Her marriage to the Austrian philosopher, Alfred Stern, took her away from her small island to many parts of the world, opening the door to varied experiences and a collection of material for her later works written for the theatre such as: Entre Francia y Suiza, Saludando la noche and Teatro infantil. She also writes novels,

Amy Koosky being the best known, and many short stories.

After a long absence from her homeland Marigloria returned to Puerto Rico in 1960 and captures in her works the native land in "The essence of its humanity, its sorrow, its illusions and its old capital".² She is also concerned with man and his destiny, time and oblivion.

Stories of a Pregnant Bee is a collection of short stories written in the contemporary style of Spanish American authors influenced by Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortazar, and Adolfo Bioy Casares, where the fantastic, the grotesque, humor and satire all make their appearance. Its title suggests the regal style in which this author gives birth to her creations. It is in the realm of the fantastic that Marigloria excels. One of the characteristics of fantastic literature is the element of surprise. The author combines this with suspicion and ambiguity to keep the reader guessing as to the strange thing that is to happen. Stories such as Las grietas ("The Cracks"), La Excusa ("The Excuse") and Fatum take the reader through a voyage of the fantastic. The names that appear in the stories are sometimes clues to the mystery that unfolds in the plot. An example of this presents itself in the story Las Grietas. According to Elsdon R. Smith, "Psychologists have discovered that if one is happy with his name, he is happy with himself".³ In "The Cracks", whose title immediately sets the tone for the personality of the protagonist, namely "cracked", her name

does not make her happy so she changes it.

Narrating in the first person, the protagonist recreates for the reader the fractioned background of her reality and mentality. In order to escape her true reality, she would make collages of different parts of people, cut out from magazines and superimposed on one another, thus erasing any true lines of configuration "because, as she puts it, I felt the need to erase definitions, to eliminate barriers, to plant chaos. Because from that chaos would surge a new and happier reality for me" (p.29).⁴ She would also do this by creating figures on her mirror. She does thus with her name as well. She admits Aunt Mila (who hates her) thinks she is crazy, but of course she doesn't agree with her aunt. Her answer to her "madness" is that she is history brought up to date by having one reality push out the other expired reality. She says her Aunt Mila feels Traia hates her and wants her death because she is rich, thus her niece will probably hire someone to kill her since that's what is "in". From the above we have the background for the plot of the mirror: to kill Mila Dabelnock; even though this does not become apparent until much later.

The protagonist then reveals her name to be like her collage, a pastiche of other names. "My name is Traia, but it is not Traia. My name is Trinidad/ you see? Trinidad ~ Trinity means Three. How then, can I be alone?" (p.28) Indeed, she is not alone, for her fragmented mind has two other parts which will become two more characters

in the story. Just as the holy Trinity is composed of the father and the son and the Holy Ghost, her name will include the father whose name bears the son. Traia says, "What I did was to remove a small piece from my father's name, whose name is Ruben. I took off the 'R'." In Hebrew, Ruben is "Raah-ben" which means "Look a son" (Gorden p. 59).⁵ Therefore, in the one letter we have both the references, to father and son, as in the Trinity. The "a" comes from Pat, a garage worker and "my best friend's husband!"

Pat from Patrick and in honor of the Saint, Patron of Ireland, who demonstrated the miracle of the Trinity with the simple plant, the Shamrock. Pat from Pater also means father.⁶

The triangle is completed by the "i". "The 'i' is from Kim, my best friend and Pat's wife" (p.28). The last 'a', she says, is from the word anxiety...(Anxiety is synonymous with life).

If we continue the comparison of the Trinity we note that, as it is represented by an icon, popular in the Eastern Orthodox Church, God is seen as not having gender. The three parts of the Trinity are three women with the same face seated at a table with a chalice in front of them symbolizing love. In Traia's Trinity, love will also be the bonding element between Pat, Kim and her, but her God wears a miniskirt and smokes marijuana.

Traia narrates how she and Kim meet Pat and decide to share him by following the doctrine of fusionism. Pat is an opportunist, first taking Kim's money before marrying her. He possesses her

body but loves Traia. Traia admits to loving Kim more than Pat but doesn't want to lose Pat.

Kim's name is a source of interest and delight to Traia. Its origin is probably from the Old English Cynebeald meaning "royally bold", a characteristic not of Kim's personality. It is found in the surname Kimball⁷ and is used by Rudyard Kipling for his character Kimball O'Hara. To Traia the name is musical, like "the falling of a small stone in the water" (p.30).

Despite the real activities carried out by both Kim and Pat as characters, there is always the impression of their existence solely in Traia's mind and mirror. We appreciate this as she says that Kim's name is so fragile that she is afraid to drop it outside of the mirror and she must make it up from more water. This and other references to her and Pat's "cracks" make us more aware of their incredibility as real persons.

The author steps in, using the third person, to make this even more obvious to the reader by describing the fabrication of Kim on the mirror by Traia. The surprise characteristic of fantastic literature is maintained by recurring allusion to the impending death of her Aunt Mila at the hands of Pat. Mila Dabelnock, whose first name comes from Emilia, meaning "industrious", is not characteristic of this old rich woman who spends her time before a T.V. set eating chestnuts. Her persecution complex with the figure of the devil makes for the plan to kill her by fright with his apparition. This

was accomplished in the narration by Pat, who dresses as Lucifer and, presenting himself before Mila, scares her to death. The result of the death was for Traia Kinder, her repudiated niece, to inherit her fortune.

The reader falls for the "trap" of the murder refrain and is convinced the crime was carried out by the many details given by Pat. are caught off guard at the end of the story by Pat's arrest by the police who have been summoned by Traia. She is not brought in with him because she convinces the police she is crazy by talking about feeding her mirrors. In a Hitchcock manner the phone rings and it is Aunt Mila who calls to talk to Pat, and to say she had a fainting spell again over her usual fixation of seeing the devil. Traia ends with the fantastic image of telling her Aunt she cannot visit her because she has to feed her mirrors.

In La Excusa ("The Excuse") Mariglioria uses the elements of surprise, humour and the grotesque. Fanfa is the grotesque figure of a box-lady who serves as the joke of the day for a group of merchants from a market and the factory workers next to it. Instead of sleeping in subways like our shopping-bag ladies, Fanfa sleeps in a cardboard box, which she defends from the sanitation men with a barrage of tomatoes, fruits and all the spoils she collects from the garbage cans.

When she first arrived at that corner she was clean and wore shoes, strutting about hand outstretched asking for a "Vellon" -

nickel. Thus her two names: Fanfa - from fanfarronear - to strut, and Vellona - nickel, made feminine by adding an "a". This pitiful character, who rewards others with laughter over her demented behavior, is recognized by Jovita, a new 18-year-old worker at the factory run by the lascivious Gerónimo. Jovita, the feminine diminutive of Jove, is like the paschal lamb to be sacrificed by Gerónimo, who is just the antithesis of his name from the Greek "Hieronymous" meaning "holy name".⁸

While the other factory workers made fun of Fanfa and try to dress her in a girdle with a pornographic drawing by Gerónimo, Jovita defends her and tries to be kind to her. She has childhood recollections of this beggar, whom her mother once called the crazy witch Miguelina. She still remembered the voice, the same one she had heard as a child at her door when the woman came to claim a daughter. Jovita never understood that mystery but felt some undecipherable emotion that drew her to Fanfa. Her mother had died and her father remarried so she was on her own and no one could stop her now from finding out the mystery behind that once elegant woman who became the box-lady. Even the low-class, foul-mouthed seamstresses had seen that in Fanfa. Fear keeps Jovita from asking Fanfa her true name and when she returns the next day Fanfa is gone. A heavy rainstorm the night before destroyed Fanfa's box and she is not to be found.

While Fanfa is in the narration, Jovita is safe from Gerónimo,

but when she disappears he makes his advances stronger. The other women warn Jovita not to fall in his clutches but she feels powerless to stop him. She finally accepts a ride from him. As he is driving at breakneck speed, one hand on the wheel and another on Jovita's knee, out of an alleyway Fanfa comes running out chased by a dog. She crosses in front of the car, causing Gerónimo to swerve. Jovita's scream "Miguelina" and the impact of the car crashing into the wall were one. The caressed knee was broken, and Gerónimo's bloodied face was the picture of a closed door.

Miguelina answers to her name with her favorite expression of "and what sort of an asparagus hypocrite was that", as she continues on her way. It is at this point that her true name takes on meaning, for like the name honoring the Archangel Michael, leader in battle and patron of the soldiers, St. Michael is also summoned to fight off Satan, as in Jude (v.9) where he contends with the devil to secure the body of Moses. Miguelina's presence fights off the devil Gerónimo and protects Jovita from him as a mother protects her child.

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NOTES

1. Josefina Rivera de Álvarez, Diccionario de literatura Puertorriqueña (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura, 1974), vol II, pp. 1133-36.
2. V.E.A. Laguerre, "La poesía de Marigloria Palma," Pulso de Puerto Rico 1952-54 (San Juan, 1956), pp. 243-252.
3. Elsdon C. Smith, Treasury of Name Lore (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 166.
4. Marigloria Palma, Stories of a Pregnant Bee (Editorial Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1975).
5. Raymond L. Gorden, Spanish Personal Names (Antioch College Press, 1968).
6. Evelyn Wells, A Treasury of Names (New York: American Book Stratford Press, Inc. 1946), p. 283.
7. Collins Gem Dictionary of First Names (London, 1980), p.223.
8. A Treasury, p. 101, pp 205-206.

