
JOSEFA MARTÍNEZ TORRES

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Analysis of "Collection of Short Novels" by Josefa Martínez

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Collection of Short Novels and Recreational Articles by Josefa Martínez Torres (The Little Blind Woman from the Quarry)

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The work of Josefa Martínez Torres established decisive connections with local and international Spiritism that extend from Puerto Rico, to the Constancia Society of Argentina, to the Barcelona periodical *La Luz del Porvenir* (*The Light of the Future*), to the Library of Congress of the United States, to the Puerto Rican Athenaeum.¹ Known as “La Cieguecita de la Cantera” (“The Little Blind Woman from the Quarry”), Martínez Torres was born in Ponce between 1862 and 1863 in a poor family. She was blind in one eye since childhood, at eight years old she lost vision in the other eye, and at ten she was left orphaned by her mother.² Martínez Torres stood out for her dictations from the afterlife. She was an auditory medium, although she practiced briefly, only two years, since she died on December 7, 1881 because of a fever.³ Manuel de Jesús Morel y Pastor, a scribe from Coamo, helped the young woman develop her mediumistic faculties and share her work with the public, transcribing her dictations and making them accessible to the international spiritist community.⁴

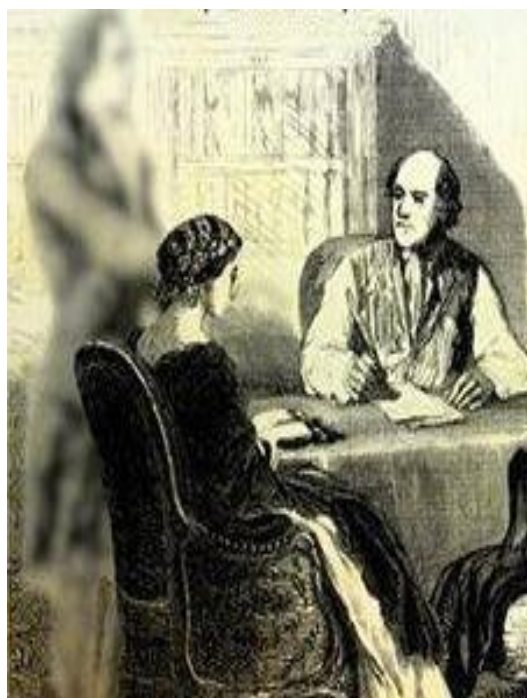


Fig. 1: Cover of Josefa's complete works compiled by Gerardo Hernández Aponte.⁵

¹ Such is demonstrated by Gerardo Alberto Hernández Aponte in his rigorous “Introductory Study” (“Estudio Introductorio”) to the only compilation of the complete works of Martínez Torres, *La Cieguecita de la Cantera: Obras completas de Josefa Martínez Torres, primera mujer novelista de Puerto Rico*, San Juan, Puerto Rico: Academia Puertorriqueña de la Historia y Asociación Puertorriqueña de Investigación de Historias de Mujeres, 2014, pp. 11-35.

² For a biographical outline of Josefa Martínez Torres, see the article by Gerardo Alberto Hernández Aponte “Josefa Martínez Torres (alias La Cieguecita de la Cantera)” (1862 ca.-1881) on https://digital.kenyon.edu/espiritismo_josefamartinez/ and his “Introductory Study” (“Estudio Introductorio”), *Op. Cit.*, p. 11-35. There is also writing about her in *El Iris de Paz*, 29 de noviembre de 1902, p. 8 and in Josefina Rivera de Álvarez, *Diccionario de literatura puertorriqueña*. San Juan, Puerto Rico: Ediciones de La Torre, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1955, p. 356.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

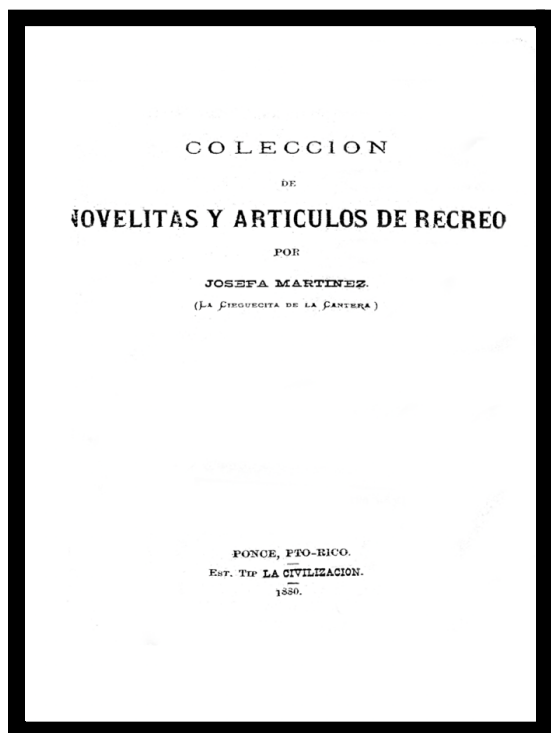
⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵ I am deeply grateful for Dr. Gerardo Hernández Aponte for giving me access to this photograph.

As Gerardo Alberto Hernández Aponte, distinguished historian and the only contemporary compiler of her works, explains, in 1880 the Spanish spiritist periodical, *La Luz del Porvenir*, began to publish her writing.⁶ Spanish spiritist Amalia Domingo y Soler, founder of said periodical, testifies:

“In September of 1879, Josefa began to visit a spiritist center where she would walk around, sing, laugh, and dance, all while asleep. She would fall asleep so frequently during the spiritist sessions, as well as outside of them, that she caught the attention of a man who was quite knowledgeable in Spiritism. He spoke with Josefa and, understanding that some Spirit was using the poor girl as a puppet,

and that Spirit obsessions can have fatal consequences, he began to give direction to the young woman’s mediumistic conditions. With his excellent treatment, he managed to make Josefa’s sleepwalking useful. On December 4, 1879, she dictated her first article while asleep, and on the 7th of the same month, she dictated her third article while awake. She did not have to fall asleep to dictate this time, because she was able to clearly hear, as she says, *the mysterious and pleasant voices of the spirits.*”⁷



Here, Domingo y Soler offers the first account of the life and mediumistic faculties of Josefa Martínez Torres and her relationship with Manuel de Jesús Morel y Pastor.⁸ As an auditory medium, Martínez Torres dictated frequently, for two consecutive years, interrupting her work only when she was feeling ill.⁹

Fig. 2: *Colección de novelitas y artículos de recreo*, Josefa Martínez, 1880.¹⁰

Her *Colección de novelitas y artículos de recreo* (*Collection of Short Novels and Recreational Articles*), published in 1880, is considered the first novel published by a woman on the Island.¹¹ Such is established for the first time by Carmen Gómez Tejera in her “Bibliografía

⁶ Gerardo Alberto Hernández Aponte, “Estudio Introductorio”, comp., *La Cieguecita de la Cantera*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 27.

⁷ Hernández Aponte, *Op. Cit.*, p. 129.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁰ I am deeply grateful for Dr. Gerardo Hernández Aponte for giving me access to this photograph.

¹¹ Juan Antonio Rodríguez Pagán, “Lección Magistral, Carmen Eulate Fernández y Sanjurjo (1871-1961) o las letras puertorriqueñas en palabras de mujer”, en *Exégesis. Revista de la Universidad de Puerto Rico en Humacao*, año 20, núm. 58, 2007, pp. 4-16, p. 8.

Cronológica de la Novela en Puerto Rico” (“Chronological Bibliography of the Puerto Rican Novel”) that appears in *La novela en Puerto Rico: Apuntes para su historia* (*The Novel in Puerto Rico: An Outline of its History*). Gómez Tejera includes only three novelists from the late nineteenth century. The first of them, Josefa Martínez Torres, published her *Colección* in 1880; Ana Roque de Duprey follows with her novels *Pasatiempos* (*Hobbies*) (1894), and *Sara la obrera* (*Sara the Worker*) (1895). The third, Carmela Eulate, published *La Muñeca* (*The Doll*) in 1895.¹²

For this reason, Hernández Aponte in his valuable “Introductory Study” of the copied edition of the complete works of Martínez Torres, notes with amazement that this work has been excluded from the critical literary discourse. Speculating about the lack of attention it has received, he explains that the novelistic genre, which emerged in Puerto Rico in the last decades of the nineteenth century, was associated with the search for national identity and the fight against Spanish colonialism; to the extent that those who addressed other topics were relegated into oblivion.¹³ Another critic, Lizabeth Paravisini, suggests that some Puerto Rican novelists have not entered into the historical-critical record simply because they are women.¹⁴ This is not surprising, since, as Sandra Enríquez Seiders, historian and president of la Asociación Puertorriqueña de Investigación de Historia de las Mujeres (the Puerto Rican Association for Women’s History Research), explains, women have been absent from nearly every field of history:

Women have been the great absentees for entire centuries of civilization, since the history of men has been synonymous with the history of humanity. The ‘official history’ is responsible for the historical invisibility that women have suffered. In wars, science, art, social struggles, politics and many other movements, women have been forgotten. That is why it is imperative to come to the rescue of women’s history, to take them out of invisibility and make them known in our historiography. The historian Hernández Aponte’s research on Josefa Martínez Torres has undoubtedly achieved this goal and invites other historians to join in this ‘rescue operation.’¹⁵

Interestingly, although Paravisini rescues at least thirty Puerto Rican novelists from obscurity, her chronology begins not with Josefa Martínez Torres, but with María Manuela Fernández whose novel, *La mano de la Providencia* (*The Hand of Providence*), published in 1882, ends up representing the first romantic-realistic novel written by a woman. This critical silence regarding Martínez Torres’s work seems to stem from the fact that her writing does not meet the critic’s expectations. Martínez Torres does not take an interest in the themes or techniques of European realists (like Galdós or Balzac), nor does she care for the romantic movement that inspired many Puerto Rican novelists of the late nineteenth century, such as Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, Federico

¹² Carmen Gómez Tejera, “Bibliografía Cronológica de la Novela en Puerto Rico”, en *La novela en Puerto Rico: Apuntes para su historia*, San Juan, Puerto Rico, Junta Editorial Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1947, pp. 123-124.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

¹⁴ Lizabeth Paravisini, “Las novelistas puertorriqueñas inexistentes”, *Cupey, Revista de la Universidad Metropolitana*, vol. VI, num. 1 y 2, enero-diciembre de 1989, pp. 91-92.

¹⁵ Sandra Enríquez Seiders, “Una mirada al libro ‘La ciegucecita de Cantera: obras completas de Josefa Martínez Torres, primera mujer novelista de Puerto Rico’”, *Alborada. Revista interdisciplinaria de la Universidad de Puerto Rico en Utuado*. Año XI, núm. 1, junio 2015-mayo 2016, pp. 59-62, pp. 61-62.

Degetau, Manuel Zeno Gandía, among others. Nor is her novel “a literary curiosity” as Carmen Dolores Hernández argues, without rigor or textual evidence, in a brief and poorly argued review of the complete works of Martínez Torres, published in the newspaper *El Nuevo Día* (*The New Day*).¹⁶ More recently, Professor Félix Córdova Iturregui speculates that the work of Martínez Torres “is the logical result of an enormous, uneducated imagination.”¹⁷ Córdova Iturregui’s thesis, that because Martínez Torres was blind and poor, she “heard the voices of her aspirations and desires” or of her “anguished inner world”¹⁸ is an argument that is difficult to prove, one which the critic proposes but does not corroborate. What is clear is that Córdova Iturregui rejects the possibility of Martínez Torres’s auditory mediumship. For this reason, he concludes by saying that the writer “had to present herself with an alien appearance. In other words, her thoughts traveled to the paper under the disguise of mysterious voices, when what had arrived there was clearly her own voice.”¹⁹ To discard the author’s spiritist and biographical context because the critic considers it implausible is a historical error and a fundamental flaw in his argument. The truth is that in order to do justice to Josefa Martínez Torres’s work and to resolve the critical debate around her writing, it is essential to place the author within the autobiographical spiritist context that she herself provides in the prologues of her works.

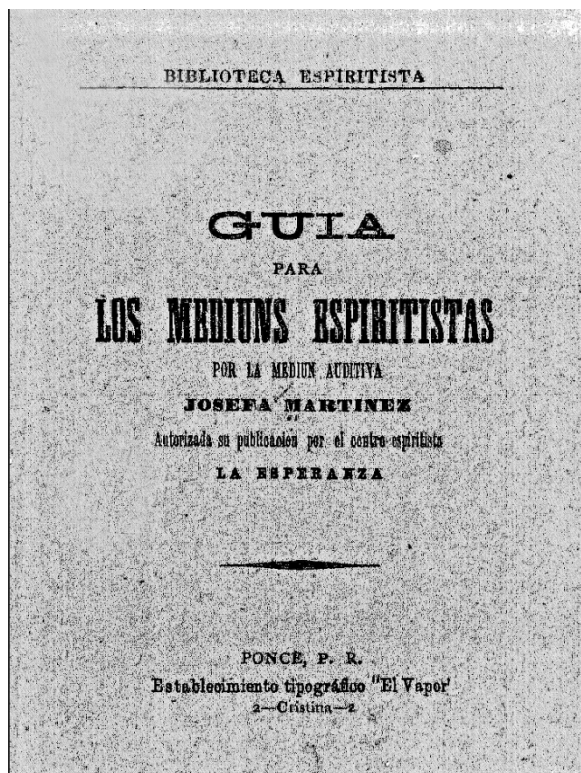


Fig. 3: Guía para los Médiums Espiritistas, Médium Auditiva Josefa Martínez, 1879.²⁰

In *Guía para los Médiums Espiritistas, por la Médium Auditiva Josefa Martínez* (*A Guide for Spiritist Mediums, by the Auditory Medium Josefa Martínez*), published in Ponce and authorized by the spiritist center La Esperanza,²¹ the author discusses not only her knowledge of the spiritist world, but also how the spiritual dictations that she shares are produced. Addressing her readers, she explains:

¹⁶ Carmen Dolores Hernández, “Una curiosidad literaria” en *El Nuevo Día*, 21 de septiembre de 2014, p. 68.

¹⁷ Félix Córdova Iturregui, “Obras completas de Josefa Martínez Torres: La Cieguecita de la Cantera. Compilador: Gerardo Alberto Hernández Aponte”, *Alborada. Revista interdisciplinaria de la Universidad de Puerto Rico en Utuado*. Año XI, núm. 1, junio 2015-mayo 2016, pp. 51-57, p. 55.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁰ I am deeply grateful for Dr. Gerardo Hernández Aponte for granting me access and use of this photograph.

²¹ As Hernández Aponte explains, this center was built in Ponce in accordance with the law, on February 3, 1891, when the Law for the right of the Association to exercise was put into effect, *La Cieguecita de la Cantera*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 28.

MY DEAR READERS

There is no doubt that there is a spiritual world where souls rest to engage in the practice of charity, when I, helpless and poor, blind

since childhood and without instruction of any kind, continuing my purpose, have been able to dictate the gentle notes that I offer you.

How can such a unique phenomenon occur?

In the simplest sense; I am only an organ that my space protectors use, and as I listen to their mysterious and pleasant voices, I can easily repeat what they tell me. My beloved God has wanted to answer my prayers, keeping me in this state so that my sorrows may be consoled and so that I may glimpse a sparkle of light.²²

Martínez Torres establishes here, without leaving room for doubt, that the texts published in her name are not the product of her intelligence, imagination, or education; they are spiritual dictations that she listens to and repeats aloud. She understands the spiritual dictation from her “space protectors,” or Spirits, as a consolation from God to allow her to see through a spiritual eye what she cannot see using her sense of sight.

As Hernández Aponte points out in his detailed and rigorous investigation of the spiritist press collected in his book *El espiritismo en Puerto Rico, 1860-1907* (*Spiritism in Puerto Rico, 1860-1907*), the dictations from the afterlife that were published in Puerto Rico became more visible in the late nineteenth century. One of the first, entitled *La lucha de un espíritu contada por sí mismo* (*A Spirit's Struggle As Told by Itself*), was obtained by a medium whose initials were F.R.G., in the center Fraternidad from Isabela. Its first edition was published in Mayagüez in 1889 and the second in Madrid in 1896.²³ *Carmen o episodio de la historia de un espíritu* (*Carmen, or a Chapter of a Spirit's Story*), by the blind and auditory medium Francisco Sánchez Hernández, was published in 1904 and *Amparo* (*Refuge*), by the same medium, was published in 1907.²⁴ In 1880, Josefa Martínez Torres had obtained and dictated the *Colección de novelitas y artículos de recreo*, but it appeared in the history of Puerto Rican literature, thanks to Carmen Gómez Tejera's “Chronological Bibliography,” as the first novel by a woman published on the Island. The spiritist press, for its part, had already noted that it was about mediumistic communications that the Little Blind Woman From the Quarry, as she was known, obtained and dictated because she was blind.²⁵

In “Dos Palabras,” the prologue to her *Colección de novelitas y artículos de recreo*, Martínez Torres addresses the origin of her works once more:²⁶

²² Josefa Martínez Torres, *Guías para Médiums Espiritistas, por la Médium Auditiva Josefa Martínez Torres*, en Hernández Aponte, comp., p. 205.

²³ Gerardo Alberto Hernández Aponte, *El espiritismo en Puerto Rico 1860-1907*, San Juan, Puerto Rico, Academia Puertorriqueña de la Historia, 2015, p. 394. The initials F.R.G. refer to the medium Francisco del Rosario González. See also Hernández Aponte, *El espiritismo en Puerto Rico, Op. Cit.*, p. 393.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 395-396.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 397.

²⁶ Josefa Martínez Torres “Dos Palabras” en Hernández Aponte, comp., p. 39.

I was born in a humble home; my parents unfortunately could not [give] me²⁷ even the most rudimentary of necessities; this, coupled [with] the fate of losing one of the most [...] gifts that God grants to His creatures; that is to say, sight [...], my existence in sad captivity with no more consolation than our little [...] house, the tender caresses of my father and my sister [...]. For that reason, God, I must today be able to dedicate this work to you. It is composed of different chapters and recreational articles, products of my lonely hours and the tireless wakefulness of a friend who urged me to continue my [...] purpose.²⁸

This passage is valuable because it allows us to contrast the living conditions of this blind young woman, from a poor background and without education, with the highly literary and moral content of her *Colección*. In the analysis that follows, I will address this content in order to highlight the complexity and literary nobleness that made Martínez Torres the first female novelist in Puerto Rico.

Collection of Short Novels and Recreational Articles: Structure of Discourse and Narrativity

Written between 1879 and 1880, *Colección* contains a mixture of short stories and articles as well as a short novel, divided into fifteen chapters. Although the narratives contain a variety of subgenres (i.e. fantastic stories, mystical stories, historical narratives, allegorical tales, etc.), they all close with an interpretation of the narrated events that summarizes a maxim about spiritist morality. The high literary quality of each text stands out. From the first line, the reader gets the impression that someone is telling a story, which unfolds with a narrative texture and literary complexity that sparks interest. Sometimes the text introduces us to the world of everyday life, as in the case of “El hijo de la aldeana;” other times it contains a healthy dose of fantasy, like in “Cuento fantástico.” In other cases, the story places the reader directly into a historical moment, marked by the century and its characters, as is the case of “El orgullo castigado,” which takes place in the seventeenth century at the court of Felipe III and Margarita de Austria. In others, like “Un sueño,” she leads the reader through the corridors of the mystical tale. Martínez Torres’s literature also offers an important and early example of self-conscious literature, which openly reflects on the writing process in the midst of the events that are being dramatized.

In what follows, we will analyze the malleability of her narrative discourse (how it expands and contracts, travels back and forth in time), and how it demonstrates great narrative agility. We will also examine how she combines the constitutive (necessary) events of the story with the supplementary events (unnecessary, but no less important for creating nuances of meaning). Another key aspect to understand, since it indicates intentionality or purpose, is the rhetoric of causality and normalization that is used to give coherence to events and make them plausible. Similarly, we will place emphasis on aspects of the narrator such as voice, reliability, focus, and narration style. The textual evidence derived from this analysis will show that Josefa Martínez Torres’s writing —produced in a short period of two years— could not have come from

²⁷ Illegible text from the copied edition is in brackets in this passage, and the rest of the analysis.

²⁸ Josefa Martínez Torres, *La Cieguecita de la Cantera*, en Hernández Aponte, comp., p. 41.

a blind young woman from a poor home and with no education. Rather, it seems to be the fruit of another being that, as we read in her prologues, the author herself identifies as her “space protectors.”

“The Villager’s Son:” From the Everyday to the Marvelous Real

“El hijo de la aldeana” (“The Villager’s Son”) exemplifies Martínez Torres’s narrative economy and the transition from the everyday to the marvelous. It begins with a clever description of the situation and the context of the story:

Dolores was a poor villager who only relied on the scarce resource that she obtained from selling fruits; she was married to a poor laborer, and [...] after having had a child, poor Dolores was left alone with her son. —Arturo, he was called.

I leave the story of the mother and move on to that of the child.²⁹

In the first sentence of the story, a year goes by and the characters are situated and introduced in terms of class and condition: Dolores, the villager, her husband, the laborer, who are both very poor, and the boy Arturo, who was left fatherless one year after he was born. The direct intervention of the narrator in the following sentence, in which she introduces Arturo (the story’s protagonist), demonstrates her discursive agility. Arturo’s story is simple. He is a child of superior intelligence; no one can beat him in school. One day, sitting on a branch of a beautiful chestnut tree, with his head lowered and his gaze fixed on the grass beneath him, he sees in his mind the image of a beautiful young woman riding a fierce steed. He returns home and tells his mother that he wants to pursue painting. Her poor mother explains that he would need a teacher, but her child convinces her by saying:

—Buy me everything, I tell you, and you will see me make a very beautiful painting without a teacher. Would you like to see a beautiful young woman, like an elegant Scottish horsewoman, riding a magnificent white horse and carrying a gorgeous bouquet of roses on her chest, watching her gaze at a beautiful palm tree with fruit?³⁰

The boy returns to the forest with the canvas and paints, and creates the image that he had seen in his mind. The boy’s painting was shown to the best teachers and purchased for a good price, which provided him with the means to continue making art. Eventually, “the best paintings of Paris were made by the son of the poor shepherdess.”³¹

Although brief, “The Villager’s Son” unites the everyday and the extraordinary in order to communicate the spiritist belief that the soul is equipped with particular talents and tendencies that have a purpose for human evolution. Regardless of poverty or disability, all human beings are able to listen and develop their ideas. Arturo did not know if he was dreaming

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

or awake when he saw in his mind the young woman mounted on the white steed, an example of a supplementary event. However, what is important is that the image carried him to another place, and that he overcame the obstacles of creating that painting. The story ends by affirming Arturo's artistic career, as he eventually becomes the best painter in Paris. How could Arturo see that image? How could Josefa Martínez Torres see and write, if she was blind, poor, and uneducated? The character's life (and the life of our beloved Puerto Rican writer) serves to exemplify the spiritist maxim that every individual's soul is aided by influences from the world of the Spirits. In a strictly literary sense, the story recalls the concept of "lo real maravilloso" ("the marvelous real") coined by Alejo Carpentier in the prologue of his novel *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of this World*).³² According to Carpentier, the marvelous real entails a valuation or appreciation of intuition, faith, and imagination. The expression of the marvelous real emerges in Latin American literature as a result of the marvelous truth of the landscape, the history, and the mixture of races and cultures; a mixture that, in this case, includes spiritist philosophy and moral doctrine. From this critical perspective, "The Villager's Son" not only depicts a spiritist maxim, but it also expresses the phenomenon of the marvelous real.

"Punished Pride" and the Historical-Moral Tale

"El orgullo castigado" ("Punished Pride") exemplifies the historical-moral tale put into a narrative key. The beginning of the story demonstrates the discursive ability of the author, who describes the context of the story and introduces the protagonist, the intelligent and cunning Rodrigo Calderón.

In the seventeenth century, there was a man in the court who, due to his intelligence and cleverness, made everyone see that he was quite a character.

This man was called Rodrigo Calderon [sic] and the event I refer to was happening [...] the reign of Felipe III and Margarita of Austria.³³

As he roams the palace hallways and city streets, Rodrigo compares himself to the King: "our good Felipe is a fool; I am a man of great intelligence and therefore I am better than him."³⁴ To which the narrator comments: "Rodrigo was His Majesty's Secretary, and he could make use of his own cleverness, but the moment came when all of his intelligence was threatened: in the presence of another man who was considered crazy."³⁵ The narrator refers to Manuel, the King's jester, who was in charge of "saving His Majesty Felipe from all the dangers that threatened him."³⁶

The story unfolds with suspense and it focuses on the characters' actions. We see Manuel head to a writing desk, take a small packet of letters, and run toward Rodrigo Calderón's room. Rodrigo greets him with indifference. Manuel confronts him about his betrayal: for four years he

³² See the "Prólogo a *El reino de este mundo*" in https://www.ingenieria.unam.mx/dcsyhfi/material_didactico/Literatura_Hispanoamericana_Contemporanea/Autor_C/CARPENTIER/P.pdf

³³ Hernández Aponte, comp. *La Cieguecita*, Op. Ci., p. 45.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

has been planning, with an Englishman, to take down Felipe III in order to become the ruler of Spain. He threatens Rodrigo, telling him that in half an hour he will be discovered because he will deliver the letters to the King. Rodrigo is puzzled, thinking there has been some sort of mistake. He does not know what to do and falls to the ground, unconscious. At this point, the narrator's voice intervenes:

Manuel's intention was not to expose Rodrigo to His Majesty: he proceeded, as aforementioned, to prevent the King from perishing because of the greed of a man as rude and miserable as his Secretary. The letters were thrown into the fire.

Let us emphasize here: in a moment, all of the hopes of a man who, four years ago, dreamed of nothing more than becoming great, were reduced to miserable ashes.

His Majesty never found out about the fatal story that could have killed him, and Rodrigo continued to be one of his most loyal friends.³⁷

The narrator's intervention as well as the story's conclusion present the spiritist moral doctrine. If Rodrigo represents excessive pride and the thirst for power, Manuel embodies the virtues of discretion, humility and honesty. Manuel uses his judgment and his virtues to rectify the destiny of a soul and a nation; a gesture of kindness with unexpected consequences. Undoubtedly, as a historical-allegorical story, "Punished Pride" imparts a moral lesson that is inspired by Spiritism, which Josefa Martínez Torres knew well and practiced as an auditory medium, thanks to her scribe and friend Manuel de Jesús Morel y Pastor. The sophisticated structure of the story, driven by suspense, the focus on the characters' actions, and the intense dialogue, demonstrate its literary quality.

"Fantastic Tale" or the Awakening of the Spiritual Consciousness

"Fantastic Tale" is much more complex than those analyzed above, not only because of its length but also because of its nineteenth century modernist style.³⁸ It also shows various narrative techniques developed by Latin American writers from the second half of the twentieth century, such as the fantastic,³⁹ temporal and spatial regression, and metafiction or self-conscious writing.⁴⁰ The story opens with a description of the protagonist, Pepita Ceuvalier:

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³⁸ In Latin America, with what is modern comes Modernism, a poetic movement from the late nineteenth century related to Positivism, a school of thought that applies the scientific method to philosophy and denies the possibility that something can be proven without its method. The modernist writer reacts against Positivism and against the cultural flatness of a society that has put its faith in progress and technology. He opposes the materialism of the time period and aspires toward a superior beauty, searches for harmonious words in order to reflect the secret harmony of the universe, and uses dazzling language and stylistic care.

³⁹ I use the term "fantastic" in its etymological sense, from the Greek *phantastikós*, meaning 'appearance,' 'image,' 'spectrum,' which Joan Corominas offers in his *Brief Dictionary of the Spanish Language* (*Breve diccionario de la lengua castellana*), 3rd edition, much revised and improved, Madrid, Gredos, 1983, p. 268.

⁴⁰ I refer to the use of metafiction and the fantastic in the writing of Carlos Fuentes and Julio Cortázar, and the temporal regression employed by Alejo Carpentier in *Journey to the Seed* (*Viaje a la semilla*).
<https://www.ucm.es/data/cont/docs/119-2014-03-31-CarpentierViajeA%20laSemilla.pdf>.

Miss Pepita Ceuvalier was a stunning young woman with boundless beauty. Imagine skin white as marble; blue eyes [...] with that clear and transparent blue that scatters our sky; hair [...] as thin as gold; a small mouth like pearls; alabaster hands and a waist [...] beautiful like that of a nymph. In short, Pepita was a prodigy, or rather, [...] a model of Nature.⁴¹

The description of Pepita is reminiscent of the modernist descriptions written, for example, by Rubén Darío in his first book *Azul (Blue)* (1888).⁴² With great stylistic care and dazzling language, precious materials, such as marble, gold, pearls and alabaster, are used to compare the beautiful Pepita with the figure of a nymph; a fantastic being that represents the elemental Spirit of the air.

The story spans two time periods. The first and last section take place in the present narrative time, in a village in Andalucía, where Pepita lives, isolated, with her mother, who refuses to let her into society out of fear of losing her. The element of the fantastic dominates the rest of the story, functioning as an amplifier of our senses, allowing us to go from what is “real” to another dimension that we will call “surreal” or “spiritual.” As in “Por boca de los dioses” (“By the Mouth of the Gods”) a story by Carlos Fuentes in which a man chases a mouth through Mexico City that has escaped from a painting and that eventually leads him to an unwanted encounter with the ancient Aztec deities,⁴³ Pepita and her lover Rafael Rosalví are led by a ghost down a path of brambles and thorns that leads them to an unwanted encounter with a statue who questions them about the reality of their love. Neither Pepita nor Rafael are able to overcome the challenges that love requires from them. A new time frame is introduced at this point, as the story leaps back, returning the reader to the present. As in Alejo Carpentier’s *Viaje a la semilla (Journey Back to the Source)*,⁴⁴ objects disappear until Rafael, the palace, and the luxurious living room vanish, while Pepita, upon hearing her mother’s sweet voice, awakens from a dream at the foot of an apple tree.

Waking up from a long dream is an important and recurring motif in world literature that usually indicates a character becoming aware of a higher understanding.⁴⁵ In this case, the fantastic elements produce doubts in the characters (and in the reader), which can only be normalized using an allegorical interpretation.⁴⁶ The conflict in the story revolves around love. Young people believe they love each other, but in reality they are motivated by selfishness and vanity. Therefore, they cannot overcome the challenges that true love demands and their dream of love vanishes. From a spiritist perspective, Pepita and Rafael’s journey represents the spiritual

⁴¹ Hernández Aponte, comp. *La Ciegucecita, Op. Cit.*, p. 62.

⁴² See, for example, “La muerte de la emperatriz de China” <https://www.biblioteca.org.ar/libros/157434.pdf>.

⁴³ Carlos Fuentes’ story, “Por la boca de los dioses”, was published in 1954 in the collection *Los días enmascarados* which marks the beginning of Fuentes’ literary career. The story can be accessed using this link: <https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWVpbnxoZXJtYW5vc2VuY3Jpc3RvaG95fGd4OjJhZGUyMWE1M2JkNzc0MTQ>.

⁴⁴ A trip that takes place in the past recalls *Viaje a la semilla* by Alejo Carpentier.

⁴⁵ It is sufficient to recall *First Dream (Primero sueño)* (1692) by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz or *Sun Stone (Piedra de sol)* (1957), by the Mexican Nobel Prize recipient, Octavio Paz.

⁴⁶ According to the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy, (el Diccionario de la Real Academia Española), an allegory is a fiction, in which a story or an image signify or represent something else. There is a depiction of something, in both a literal sense and a figurative one, by means of several consecutive metaphors, in order to imply one thing by expressing another.

development of the human soul, which, facing its greatest challenge (learning to love), makes mistakes and pursues illusions that do not lead to enlightenment or what we call happiness. This is revealed at the end of the story.

As a conclusion, Josefa Martínez Torres offers her interpretation of the end of the tale:

Dear readers who enjoyed my story: if you wish, use it as an example, or else do whatever you like. As I am the one who dictated it, I will allow myself to advise those of you who consider yourselves young and beautiful: don't let yourselves live with those false illusions: see how Miss Ceuvalier could have been happy with her mother's affection, but she made herself miserable by being carried away by her ambition. A beautiful young woman should not wish for more fortune than her virtue, and living content and resigned, her future will come effortlessly.

Pepita had no pride; it happened because she was in a society where she did not shine brightly enough; if she had been in one of those circles of the Madrid aristocracy, she would have seen more than a hundred young men die at her feet, taken by her beauty. That is why she had to live isolated in that village, tormented by her self-love, despite not having known luxury, she was vain and believed she was the queen of the place (...) wretched be those who let themselves be carried away by that disease called ambition! They will never be happy!⁴⁷

By offering her opinion on what she dictated, Martínez Torres introduces her spiritist perspective, which includes beliefs about the need for modesty in beautiful young women. Her analysis of Pepita's character is based on the spiritist law of cause and effect: there is no effect without cause and all debt must be paid. From a spiritist point of view, although Pepita's soul carries her pride and ambition, her Spirit chose to live isolated in a village in order to free herself from the temptation of excessive pride and self-love. Her mother, who acts as one of her spiritual helpers, understands that what is most useful for her spiritual evolution is to live in the village. This explains why, in "Cuento fantástico," the happiness of the soul is considered both a mysterious search and a prize, discovered along a path of challenges and decision-making, for which the human soul relies on spiritual guides for help along the way. The incorporation of both a literal and figurative sense, through allegory, allows us to read the work as an example of spiritist morality and as an astonishingly complex fantastic tale, which can be compared with the stories that, many decades later, distinguished our best Latin American writers.

"A Dream," a Mystical-Spiritist Tale

In "Un sueño" ("A Dream"), Josefa Martínez Torres takes her readers through one of her dreams, which includes life on another planet and knowledge that she receives from Spirits superior to her. The story begins with an explanation in which the narrator compares phenomena that science has been able to understand, like electricity and the speed of light and sound, with thought, until now unexplainable, because: "with it we reach what is infinite, and once in this

⁴⁷ Hernández Aponte, comp. *La Cieguecita*, Op. Cit., p. 72.

state of transport, we believe that our body and mind are united, and we examine everything that we perceive around us, without understanding perfectly what is happening to us.”⁴⁸ With absolute clarity, Martínez Torres explains that she fell asleep thinking about the greatness of Creation, and describes all of the wonders that she saw with the eyes of her soul as she ascended in space. Using the historical present, we are able to witness what the Little Blind Woman of the Quarry sees, and her conversations with the Spirits who inhabit that unknown planet.

The descriptions are very beautiful and unique. There are lush trees with orange leaves and blue flowers with red crosses in their center; bushes full of purple fruits that form large bouquets, and “in the center of the bouquet you can see five flowers forming a cross.”⁴⁹ The extraordinary beauty of the arrangement awakens in her a deep desire to possess it, but just as she cuts it she hears a voice saying: “Who has given you the right to the ‘astrominas’ (these flowers)? Don’t you know that you are on another planet and that you cannot take anything that is found on it?”⁵⁰ A nymph, or elemental Spirit of the air, speaks to her, giving off a dazzling glow. She walks into a garden full of flowers and birds with extraordinary feathers. The beauty of their innocent and happy life makes her envious: “I feel overcome with envy and I long to be on the golden sand of that ground to enjoy the birds. At the moment I am taken from the rock and I find myself sitting where I wanted to be.”⁵¹ She hears a chorus of laughter; the birds and flowers are transformed into nymphs that talk quietly, and the dreamer feels the same emotion again: “I find myself possessed by the same envy because I want to know what those innocent beings are saying to each other,”⁵² but one of them approaches her and invites her to join the group. As she sits with the nymphs, the dreamer understands the difference between the world she is observing and the human realm. In the human world, many passions cannot be satisfied because they are too indulgent. Although she desires the world that she is witnessing, the time has not yet come for her to enjoy complete happiness: “When you have finished the tasks that you still need to fulfill on that planet, if you know how to carry out your duty, you will come to enjoy this life of dreams; which is precisely where you are; once you return, it will be for a long time.”⁵³ The nymphs sing a hymn of praise to greet the Creator, the One who made all of this beauty, and they disappear:

Praise God
 Lord of creation
 With His infinite love
 We are filled with hope⁵⁴

Silence falls and the dreamer senses that the time has come to depart from that place of happiness: “This is the life of the angels who have entered into glory for the virtues that they have practiced.”⁵⁵ Martínez Torres does not doubt what she has dreamed of, but she recognizes the difficulty of conveying her experience to others. For this reason, she explains: “What I am

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

describing is just a dream for me, but it is true because I cannot doubt what I witnessed.”⁵⁶ Before waking up, she returns to the One who transported her to that place, who says: “Now you must return to that place of yours in the world of illusions. Do not forget what you have seen so that you can refer to it however you like.”⁵⁷ She feels tired, downcast. She forces herself to wake up, fatigued, as if she had returned from a long journey, remembering everything that happened to her in her dream.

How do we interpret a story that is claimed to be a real dream? Is it possible to move from an entirely subjective perspective to a relatively objective one? I propose that, if we consider the story within a mystical-spiritist critical framework, it is possible to approach it with certain objectivity. Thinking about the mystical dimension, we must keep in mind that the motive that drives Martínez Torres’s dream is the same as that of the mystic: to distinguish the extraordinary (the greatness of God and His Creation) from the ordinary (the material, corporeal world). The mystic’s consciousness ascends from the body into an infinite space in order to search for God and the love of his Creation. Martínez Torres, blind since childhood, shares the same desire as the mystic, and is able to ascend with the same simplicity to see—with the eyes of the soul—something never before witnessed. The world that she observes and interacts with is not only incredibly beautiful; it also represents the abundance of the beloved community of heaven, where there are no human passions, which can never be satisfied because they are too selfish and indulgent. The “life of the angels who have entered into glory,” as Martínez Torres describes it, is earned through the practice of good virtues. That is the lesson she draws from her mystical experience.

From a spiritist perspective, human life was granted to Martínez Torres in order to cleanse her of her imperfections through the challenges that she endures.⁵⁸ That is why the superior Spirit who speaks to her in her dream warns her that when she has finished the difficult tasks that remain to be fulfilled on Earth, she will be able to enjoy the world of dreams that she has witnessed. “Un sueño” may also represent one of the worlds that the spiritist astronomer Camille Flammarion conceived of in his book *Pluralidad de mundos habitados* (*Plurality of Inhabited Worlds*).⁵⁹ A personal friend of Allan Kardec, Flammarion was, in addition to being an astronomer and founder of the French Astronomical Society, a psychographic medium who associated Spiritism with science. Perhaps because of this context, the Spirits that speak in Martínez Torres’ dream call their worlds “planets,” parts of the universe or of God’s Creation. A spiritist reading of “Un sueño” would understand the dream as a journey of the incarnate soul or of the conscience that yearns to witness the greatness of the spiritual universe. Beyond these interpretations, the most extraordinary thing about “Un sueño” is that, using an enormous literary

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁵⁸ Allan Kardec, *El libro de los Espíritus*, trad. Gustavo N. Martínez. Brasília (DF), Brasil: Consejo Espírita Internacional, 2011, p. 467.

⁵⁹ In addition to *Pluralidad de mundos habitados*, Camille Flammarion published *Lumen*, *Dios y la Naturaleza*, *Mundos reales y mundos imaginarios*, *La casa de los duendes*, *El fin del mundo*, *La astronomía popular* y *La muerte es un misterio*, among others. See also “El astrónomo espiritista”, Camille Flammarion, *El Nuevo Criterio*, núm. 14, octubre, 1995, p. 1.

wealth, the Young Blind Woman from the Quarry builds a world using words that allow us to see not only that world, but the eyes she uses to witness it so eagerly.⁶⁰

The stories analyzed here show that *Colección de novelitas y artículos de recreo* deals with a theme that is difficult to represent — the mysteries of the soul — for which Martínez Torres uses a whole repertoire of narrative techniques and genres, including the fantastic story, the mystical tale, the historical narrative, and the allegorical tale. Each story ends with an interpretation of the narrated events that summarizes a maxim of spiritist morality. The literary quality of Josefa Martínez Torres's writing is of utmost interest. At times the text shows us the world of everyday life, other times it contains a healthy dose of fantasy. In some cases, the event places us directly into a historical moment, and in others it leads us through the paths of a mystical story. She employs an excellent rhetoric of causality and narrative normalization that gives coherence to the events that she depicts. It is an important and early example of self-conscious literature, as it includes open reflections on the writing process in the midst of dramatized events. Rescued from obscurity by historian Gerardo Alberto Hernández Aponte, Martínez Torres's work has raised a heated debate that has excluded it from critical literary discourse. Evidently, her work cannot be approached with a nineteenth-century critical perspective, since her narrative is not romantic, realist, or naturalist; it is clearly spiritist. This shows that this extraordinary young woman from La Cantera, blind and poor as she was, wrote what she heard in a short period of two years, with extraordinary grace and a high literary command.

⁶⁰ In her book *Ten Windows: How Great Poems Transform the World*, the writer Jane Hirshfield very clearly sums up very clearly the relationship between the desire of mystics and that of artists when she says: "The desire of monks and mystics is not unlike that of artists: to perceive the extraordinary within the ordinary by changing not the world but the eyes that look." I thank my colleague, friend, and visual artist Greg Spaid for the timely allusion to Hirshfield's book that has inspired in me much thought.