With the Eyes of a Woman: Carmela Eulate's Stories of Family and Marriage

Myriam Borges Thompson

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Unionville, NY 10988-0399
(845) 726-4444
fax: (845) 726-3824
email: mail@rfwp.com
website: rfwp.com

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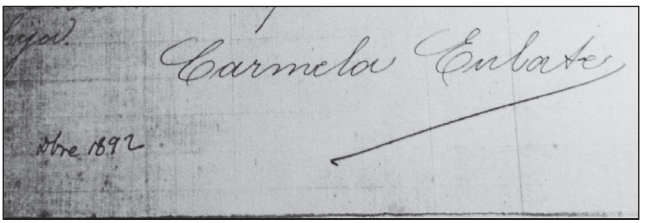

From the manuscript of Carmela Eulate's *Noche-Buena*

In translating these stories that I found in the General Archives of Puerto Rico, I received help from Michael Clay Thompson, my husband, always an attentive and enthusiastic reader whose support and knowledge of the English language made him an invaluable asset to this project. The transgressions and mishaps that might afflict these pages I reached on my own.

Myriam Borges Thompson, Ph.D.

Publisher's Foreword

In the archives in Puerto Rico, Dr. Myriam Borges Thompson has found two short stories that together shed light on many areas. Finding them was an achievement in and of itself, but identifying their importance marks the editor and translator as an unusually perceptive scholar.

These stories not only have their place in Puerto Rican literature and in the biography and artistic development of the author Carmela Eulate, but they also are a contribution to intellectual history, family history, women's history, gender studies, and generational studies. Their focus on family dynamics and relationships between the generations and with in-laws—interplaying with the force of beliefs—provides social and cultural historians with views as seen through a sensitive lens of some of the hardest relationships to recreate. The sensitivity of the lens is crucial; too often insight is impossible because characters are rendered as cultural stereotypes.

One is struck by the enormous amount of labor it takes to revive works such as these in usable format. They must first be digitized, then checked carefully, then translated, then checked again, then typeset, and then checked again and again. There is an enormous amount of the most basic and painstaking work that must go into the preparation of a complex book such as this to make it reliably usable by other scholars. Fortunately, these stories well repay the effort, which has so evidently been put forth at every step of the process by Dr. Borges Thompson.

Dr. Thomas M. Kemnitz

Introduction

Plaza Santiago, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1892

Historical Background

In 1892 an array of events formed a prelude for the approaching changes of the twentieth century. The year saw the opening of Ellis Island to receive new immigrants to the United States, the secret signing of the French/Russian Duple Alliance by Chiefs of Staff Obruchev and Boisdeffre, the arrest of Sunday school teacher Lizzie Borden, the premiers of Massenet's opera *Werther* in Vienna and Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* in St. James, London, and the founding of the American Psychological Association in Worcester, Massachusetts. Among this array of events was Spain's celebration of the 400th anniversary of the "Discovery of the New World" by Columbus.

By 1892 the wars of independence of the former Spanish colonies had left Spain, with its few and "agitated"

possessions in the New World, little to celebrate. Britain, France, Belgium, and Germany had adopted Euro-centrist interpretations of history, placing Spain and the young Latin American countries in an embarrassing and undesirable position on the world stage. As Diana Arbaiza comments in *Transatlantic Transactions: Writing Hispanism at the Centennial in 1892*, Spain and these Latin American countries were seen as being "outside the margins of modernity" (Arbaiza 12).

To counter the effects of those undesirable views, Spain planned to invite the Latin American countries to a "Discovery of the New World" celebration. In this context, it was in the interest of the countries excluded from circles of power to embrace the "powerful signifier of *Hispanism*," an idealistic, spiritual union—Arbaiza calls it a "compensatory Empire" for Spain—that was juxtaposed with the materialism of the Anglo-Saxon and French political and economic interests (Arbaiza 100) and that represented an alternative perspective to their history and strength. The intellectual exchange that was occasioned by the "Discovery" celebration and that continued thereafter provided Spanish-speaking countries with a variety of literary discussions and exercises. These cultural exchanges masked the commercial and political interests that lay in the undercurrent.

As one of the few "agitated" remaining possessions of Spain in the Americas in 1892, the island of Puerto Rico experienced slow financial and social development based on the exportation of coffee. Aware of the political and commercial interests of other countries—especially the United States—in Puerto Rico and Cuba, Spain had maintained a strong hand in the government of both islands.

In earlier times, Puerto Rico was seen by Spain as "the key to the New World." In fact, San Juan's military buildings and massive protective walls are testimony to the island's geographical importance for the Spanish Empire. For Puerto Rico, the celebration of the "Discovery" would be marked with festivities and the unveiling of a commissioned statue of Columbus, which has stood ever since in the plaza formerly known as the Plaza of St. James (Santiago) and which now has Columbus's name, Plaza Colón.

The family of Carmela Eulate, the author of the two stories in this book, lived less than a block from the plaza where the "Discovery" celebrations took place. Her family had a comfortable one-story home and lived surrounded by a collection of Spanish and world classics (including the complete works of Alexander Dumas and the novels of Sir Walter Scott, George Sand, Saint Pierre, and Ponson du Terrail), expensive paintings, mahogany furnishings, and a grand piano. In this house, with green-painted gates, on August 30, 1871, Carmela Eulate was born.

Painting by Maria Eulate Sanjurjo, 1892

It is believed that Maria's painting was inspired by Monet's 1875 painting *Woman with a Parasol*, shown on the front cover of this book.

Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo (1871-1961)

Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo

Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and died in Barcelona, Spain, when she was almost ninety years old. She was an avid reader and obtained a better education than most *señoritas* living in the Spanish colonies and in many cities in the Spanish peninsula.

Carmela and her sister María—as the daughters of Antonio Eulate Fery, an important Spanish Navy officer—were well aware of Spain's "Discovery" celebrations in 1892. By that year, when they were in their twenties, the young and talented Eulate sisters were eager to participate in the artistic activities on the island. Newspapers announced the merits of Carmela as a singer and pianist and María as a painter.

In order to convey her artistic views of the world, Carmela also found time to pursue literary interests and to write. Her

first works of fiction, written before her critically acclaimed first novel, *La Muñeca*, allowed her to represent what she saw and felt about society's ills from the safety of meticulously selected language. Although the influences of the Romantic movement had a strong hold on the creative efforts of Puerto Rican writers, Carmela's need to examine her world and society's illnesses through an objective, realistic lens influenced her approach to prose. Her first writings present an honest perspective on humanity's experiences—on love, war, justice and the law, and forgiveness—all in the context of how a woman's role in society affects family dynamics.

Carmela's feminine perspective on life makes the development of her initial storylines and characters original and intriguing. At a time when women were not allowed to have a formal education, to travel, or to express literary or political opinions, Carmela Eulate provided her readers with female characters who defied, with their actions and words, the traditional views of women.

Carmela lived in Puerto Rico until the age of twenty-six, when her father took the family to Spain after the conclusion of the Spanish-American War. Due to her privileged family position, Carmela received an excellent education and was able to travel and to learn about the life and culture of people of different countries. In addition to her native Spanish and the French and English that she had learned in Puerto Rico, Carmela soon became fluent in Italian, German, Arabic, and Russian.

There is no doubt that after she left Puerto Rico, the exposure to life in different countries enriched Carmela's intellect, but one can infer from her early writings that it was

her intimate, secret world that she had developed and nurtured in Puerto Rico that gave her the maturity and sophistication to approach sensitive topics with care, honesty, clarity, and elegance.

The literary works of Carmela Eulate consist of poetry, essays, novels, short stories, and biographies. She wrote ten novels (of which two, *Bocetos de Novelas* and *Antología del Alma*, remained unpublished at the time of her death), twelve biographies, more than twenty short stories, and other works that are unpublished. Among the authors who attracted her interest—and whose works she shared with her readers by translating the texts into Spanish—we find the works of Arab poets, as well as Dante, Shakespeare, Victor Hugo, Shelley, Byron, Poe, Wordsworth, Heine, Verlaine, Browning, Carducci, Musset, Samain, Keats, Lang, Longfellow, Rosetti, Whitman, Tennyson, and Schiller. Eulate wrote more than a dozen biographies of musicians and historical figures, including *Vida Sentimental de Schiller* (1942), *Vida de Schubert* (1942), *María Estuardo* (1928), *Isabel la Católica* (1925), *María Antonieta* (1929), *Eugenia de Montijo* (1946), *Wolfgang Amadeo Mozart* (1936), *Santa Teresa* (1931), *Los Amores de Chopín* (1926), and *La Humilde y Gloriosa Vida de Schubert* (1944).

For her contributions to literature, Carmela Eulate received important awards and recognitions. She was a member of the Arcadia of Rome, the most prestigious Academy in Europe. In *Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo: Puertorriqueña Ilustre* (1966), a biography of Eulate by Margarita Silva, we learn that Eulate received from the Arcadia the pseudonym *Dórida Merenis* (Silva 135) and that she also became an Honorary Member at the Atheneum

in Washington, D.C., as well as the Galician Academy. Nonetheless, Eulate's name remains unknown to the modern reader. Why?

Silva includes a letter written by Carmela to a friend in Puerto Rico, dated in 1956, in which she mentions a "long letter" that she addressed to the Chancellor of the University of Puerto Rico (she calls him the "Director" and refers to him as "Mr. Benítez") and in which she expresses her frustration about "the boycott" of her works (Silva 209). The facts of the boycott are not known, but this might explain—although not justify—the fact that in Puerto Rico, Eulate's writings are not well known.

Carmela Eulate dedicated her life to the perfection of her craft and to the satisfaction of the innate curiosity of her gifted being—one of great talent and artistic sensibility. She used her intellectual capacity and her literary and musical interests to represent a particular perspective that emphasizes the importance of education and the study of history for all human beings, especially women. From a young age, Carmela desired to improve society and promote the rights of women, leading her to participate in intellectual meetings, *tertulias*, held at the home of Ana Roqué on Cruz Street, San Juan. From then on, due to her talent and dedication, Carmela received support and encouragement to publish her translations and original short stories from distinguished writers and scholars, including Manuel Fernández Juncos, Ana Roqué, and Manuel Zeno Gandía.

I should caution readers that my objective is to present a sample of the themes that Eulate wished to propose to her readers, and I approach the analysis of the short stories with

that in mind. My desire is to promote interest in the study of the literary contributions of a Puerto Rican woman who was also one of the first humanists of the Americas. For that reason, in the following pages I provide my English translation of two short story manuscripts written in 1892 that I found in the Archivo General de Puerto Rico: *Noche-Buena* and *Bocetos de Novela: Drama Íntimo*. Both short stories were published between the months of October and December of 1892 in the journal *La Ilustración Puertorriqueña*. In these texts we find the genesis of the critical dialogue that Eulate wished to establish with her readers.

In order to provide readers with an enjoyable and honest approach to the Spanish language texts, I have maintained the essence of Carmela Eulate's original vocabulary and grammatical structures—when at all possible—in the English translations.

In this introduction we cannot study these works at the profound level they deserve, but we can explore the references, the convergences and divergences of ideas, themes, and character development between these two initial stories of Carmela Eulate and the novel she published three years later, *La Muñeca* (1895).

In these three works Eulate takes a look at the traditional role of the woman in society as daughter, wife, and mother. She uses an elegant style to make use of clear, direct, and simple expressions that, in her role as a detached observer, allow the representation of themes that are ever relevant to humanity: war, peace, love, justice, and forgiveness.

Her use of an author-omniscient voice reveals not only the way she sees her characters but also the way they see

themselves and everything that surrounds them. In order to emphasize the objective quality of the narration and to complete the profile of her characters, Eulate focuses on the past that formed their psychological framework. Exposing the past events in the lives of the characters allows for a foundation to extrapolate the significance of their thoughts, words, and actions to the development of the story. Thus, the schema of events narrated in these texts is introduced, developed, and culminated from the perspective of the penetrating glance that Eulate, with the eyes of a woman, gives to society.

When we discuss the creation and development of the characters in the two earlier short stories, we should remember that Eulate's probing feminine glance lingers for a longer period of time on the female characters. With this device, readers too can decipher the meaning of the words, thoughts, and actions of characters that break with the traditional vision of the role of the woman in nineteenth-century society. Such is the case with Doña Natividad, the strong-willed female character in the *Noche-Buena* story who, when she became a widow at a young age, decided to raise her children alone. The determined and domineering personality of Natividad hides the fear of an uneducated, insecure, and selfish woman—a woman who was accustomed to demanding obedience from everyone for fear of losing what she had.

The development of the narration in *Noche-Buena* maintains a measured rhythm, and the language and expressions of the characters are in harmony with the social class they represent. Although the place where the action occurs is never mentioned in the text, the language of the

narration includes references to Puerto Rican expressions for "people of color" and "Christmas Eve Mass." Doña Natividad kneels in front of the "Altar de la Providencia"—one of San Juan Cathedral's chapels that is dedicated to the patroness of Puerto Rico, Our Lady of Divine Providence. There are also references to Puerto Rican culture in the "chicken and rice" dish, the typical musical instruments such as "el güiro" and "las maracas," and the type of music that is heard on the streets, reminiscent of the "aguinaldos" and "danzas." Thus, the strokes that Eulate uses to impart a popular flavor to the narration paint the picture of the Puerto Rican environment.

Eulate establishes an ambience that is characterized by the juxtaposition of the luxury and abundance of life in the city with the poverty and sickness in the countryside. This contrast is achieved through the description of the elaborate decorative elements in Natividad's home in the city, the details of the Christmas Eve holiday menu that she prepares for the family dinner, and the presence of a house staff of maids and servants. Illness and poverty in the countryside are represented in Eulate's narrative voice by expressions that denote the precarious situation of the protagonist's son Gabriel and his family after they tried to survive on a doctor's salary living near a small town "in the island."

Noche-Buena begins with the description of the grandmother, the *abuela*, Doña Natividad. Eulate's narrative voice in the third person tells readers about the thoughts and feelings of remorse experienced by the character, a mother who, carried away by her selfishness and arrogance, forced her son to choose between herself and his wife, causing her own and her son's unhappiness. As a result of her

Noche-Buena
The Good Night

Todos se habían marchado para asistir a la misa del gallo, y sólo la abuela a quien la edad y sus achaques, aquel año más fuertes que de costumbre, impedían toda salida nocturna, quedaba en la casa. Dos criadas comenzaban a poner la mesa, y se oía el repiqueteo de los platos de loza al chocar unos con otros, el ruido de los cubiertos que colocaban en sus sitios correspondientes, todo mezclado con el agradable olor del arroz con pollo que se guisaba en la cocina. En el aparador aguardaban su turno los fiambres, las conservas, los frascos de dulces y el medio barril de uvas de España, todo el arsenal de comestibles destinado a hacer de la cena de Navidad una fecha célebre para el paladar de los gastrónomos.

La abuela contemplaba silenciosa los preparativos que se hacían en ausencia de los comensales. Aquella noche, en que se había prometido tanta alegría, se le anunciaba con lúgubres pensamientos. Clotilde y Teresa, sus dos hijas casadas, iban, en unión de sus maridos y sus hijos, a cenar con ella, se había sacado del colegio a su nieto Federico, para que los acompañase, y sin embargo, nada de esto hacía olvidar a la anciana que el puesto de la derecha, el que había ocupado siempre su hijo Gabriel, estaría vacío. Y precisamente éste era el único de sus hijos varones que vivía, y en el cual cifró todo su orgullo maternal.

Everyone had left in order to attend Midnight Mass, and only the grandmother, due to her old age and the ailments that bothered her that year more than ever, remained in the house. Two maids had started to set the table, and the click-clack sound of the china as they sorted it could be heard along with the sound of the silverware that was placed in corresponding places, everything mingled with the nice smell of the chicken and rice dish that was cooking in the kitchen. On the sideboard, a whole arsenal of comestibles such as cold cuts, preserves, jellies, jams, and half a barrel of Spanish grapes awaited their turn to please the palate of the gourmands and make of the Christmas dinner a glorious occasion.

The grandmother watched silently as everything was prepared in the absence of the guests. This night, that promised her so much joy, was filling her mind instead with lugubrious thoughts. Clotilde and Teresa, her two married daughters, their husbands and children were coming to have dinner with her, and they had gotten Federico, her grandson, home from boarding school so he would also accompany them at dinner. However, none of this was enough to make the old woman forget that the place on the right side at the table, the one where her son Gabriel sat always, was going to be empty that night. Gabriel was her only surviving son, and he was precisely the one in whom she placed all her maternal pride.

Se hallaba ahora lejos, quizás sufría, sin que ella pudiera secar sus lágrimas con uno de sus besos, que son un poema de amor y solo saben dar las madres.

Lo volvía a ver pequeño, alegre, el número uno del colegio, llevándole enorgullecido sus premios y sus medallas, con aquella sonrisa que iluminaba su redonda carita con la irradiación de la dicha. Y Gabriel había sido siempre para ella el mismo hijo amante y sumiso, plegando su voluntad de hombre, como sus caprichos de niño y su fantasía de adolescente a la única norma de complacerla y hacerla feliz. ¡Cuántas veces había ido a arrodillarse ante el altar de la Providencia, para rogarle a la Virgen que se lo quitara todo, fortuna, honores, salud, antes que quitarle a su hijo! Pero aquel mismo cariño le había hecho formar poco a poco el carácter de su hijo, sin dejarse llevar a mimarle ni falsear sus cualidades. Le había moldeado como se moldea una estatua de barro, pero con la mano firme de un artista, y el éxito había sobrepujado a sus esperanzas. La gente se admiraba de cómo Natividad, que había quedado viuda tan joven pudo educar de tal modo a sus hijos, y hacer de Gabriel aquel modelo de estudiantes que le envidiaban todas las madres. Y es que Natividad ocultaba bajo su figura insignificante un temple de alma y una fuerza de voluntad que le permitían seguir sin vacilaciones, el camino que una vez se hubiera trazado.

Now he was far away, suffering perhaps, without allowing her to dry his tears with one of her kisses, which are a love poem and which only mothers know how to give.

She could see him again as a little guy, happy, first in his class at school, proudly bringing her his report cards, awards, and medals, with that smile that illuminated his round, darling face radiating happiness. And Gabriel had always been the same loving son, submissive, surrendering his childhood whims, adolescent fantasies, and his will as a man to the only objective of pleasing her and making her happy. How many times she had gone to kneel in front of the altar of the Divine Providence to beg that everything would be taken from her—fortune, honors, health—before having her son taken from her! But that same love allowed her to shape, little by little, the character of her son, without spoiling him or falsifying his qualities. She had molded him as you shape a clay statue, but with the firm hand of an artist, and the successful result had surpassed her expectations. People admired the way that Natividad, who became a widow at a young age, could educate her children so well and had made Gabriel the model student that other mothers envied. And it is a fact that Natividad hid under her insignificant figure a fierce will and courageous soul that allowed her, once she had traced her path, to continue without hesitations.

Un alegre grupo de hombres y mujeres de color pasó por la calle, cantando con acompañamiento de güiros, esa coplas de aguinaldo que tienen el lánguido ritmo de una danza. Alejábanse pausadamente, y el aire traía el lejano estribillo, o alguna que otra nota aguda de las voces de las mujeres. La abuela se movió en su sillón, interrumpida en su soliloquio mental por la música, pero sin que su pensamiento pudiera apartarse de Gabriel.

Recordaba ahora cómo ella, que le hubiera parecido poco para su hijo una duquesa, tuvo que aceptar su matrimonio con una muchacha de clase humilde. Clotilde y Teresa estaban casadas ya, y la anciana no quiso de ningún modo consentir en que Gabriel y su mujer fuesen a vivir a otra parte. Por lo demás, el joven acababa de concluir su carrera de médico y no ganaba lo suficiente para poner casa aparte. Guadalupe—que así se llamaba la recién casada—aceptó de mala voluntad, porque nacida y criada en la pobreza había soñado en vivir sola, teniendo casa propia, y satisfaciendo todos sus caprichos. No tardó en surgir la enemistad entre ella y su suegra, y se le antojaba que Doña Natividad era un vigilante de todas sus acciones. Sabía que se había opuesto a su matrimonio, y le guardaba de ello un profundo rencor, que ocultaba cuidadosamente a Gabriel.

[This paragraph continues on the following page.]

A happy group of men and women of color went by on the street, singing with the accompaniment of *güiros*, those songs of *aguinaldo* that have the languid rhythm of a *danza*. They were moving slowly, and the air brought back the faraway sound of the refrain and some of the female voices' high notes. The grandmother moved in her rocking chair, her mental soliloquy interrupted by the music but without abandoning her thoughts of Gabriel.

Now she was remembering how she, who would have thought that a Duchess was not good enough for her son, had to accept his marriage with a girl of a lower class. Clotilde and Teresa were married already, and the old lady did not want to agree in any way that Gabriel and his wife would live somewhere else. On the other hand, the young man had just finished medical school and did not earn enough money to get a new house. Guadalupe—that was the name of the new bride—accepted this offer unwillingly, because born and raised in poverty she had dreamt of living in her own house, managing a household, and satisfying all her whims. It did not take long for enmity to arise between Guadalupe and her mother-in-law, and she capriciously preferred to believe that Doña Natividad was watching all her actions. She knew that her mother-in-law had opposed her marriage, and because of that she felt a deep rancor toward her that she hid carefully in front of Gabriel.