

# The female *Bildungsroman* in the Works of Rosario Castellanos and Elena Poniatowska

Margarita L. Chavez Escobar

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Advisors: Dr. Donaldo Urioste & Dr. Maria Zielina

# Abstract

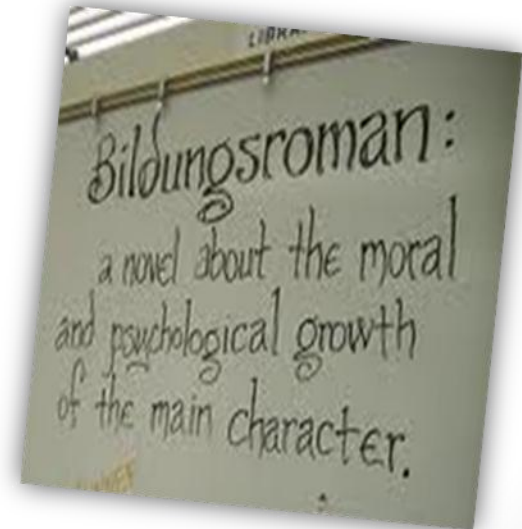
- The purpose of this project is to define and identify the female Bildungsroman in México. To do this, I will examine the development of the Bildungsroman as a literary genre and discuss the literary theories and tendencies that are associated with it. After discussing the characteristics of this type of narrative I analyze *Rito de iniciación* (1969) by Rosario Castellanos, and *Hasta no verte Jesús mio* (1969) by Elena Poniatowska, two Mexican *bildungsroman* that address female protagonists: Cecilia Rojas y Jesusa Palancares. Focusing on these characters I provide an analysis of the Psychological and moral development of each of them to fully understand both the terminology and the practice of the female *Bildungsroman*.

# Outline

- The *Bildungsroman*
- The Female *Bildungsroman*
- The Female *Bildungsroman* in Mexican Literature
  - Elena Poniatowska & Rosario Castellanos
- Literary Analysis: *Rito de Iniciación*
  - Plot
  - Captive Cecilia
  - The Journey towards Cecilia's Liberation
  - Autonomous Cecilia
  - The conception of the *Bildungsroman* in Cecilia
- Conclusion
- Bibliography

# The *Bildungsroman*

- The concept originated in the German bourgeoisie
- The word comes from the combination of *bildung* (education) y *roman* (novel)
- Wilhelm Dilthey officially introduced the term in 1870 and gave the first Definition of it, recognizing the *Bildungsroman* as:  
"novels that show the development of a human being through the different stages of its life"



# The Female *Bildungsroman*

- Recognized during the 70s
- Created mainly to describe how women interact with the ephemeral world along their process of personal development.
- It tries to defy the factors of society that have marginalize women in various ways by giving women the will to go against them in order to survive or change them for their own benefit.
- The final outcome of the Female *Bildungsroman* focuses on giving the protagonist its autonomy and independence.



# The Female *Bildungsroman* in Mexican Literature

## Rosario Castellanos

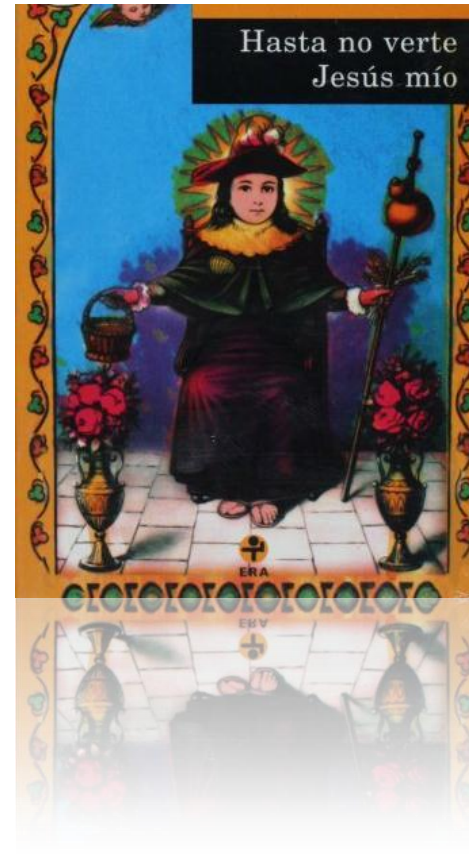
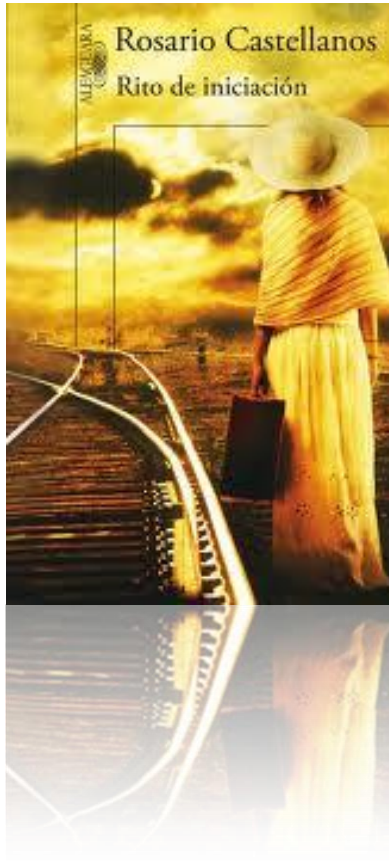
- Born in Mexico City on May 25, 1925
- Dies on 1974 while serving as a Mexican ambassador in Israel
- Her family came from the elite class of the state of Chiapas, Mexico
- She finished her studies at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM)

## Elena Poniatowska

- Born in Paris on May 19, 1933
- Polish father and Mexican mother
- She began her career as a journalist in 1954
- She remains as one of the best well known Mexican writers and continues to gain recognition in the world of Literature
- **Both authors are considered part of the Latin American Feminist Writers**
- **They focused their work of portraying the image of women in Mexican society**



# The Female *Bildungsroman* in Mexican Literature



# Rito De Iniciación

Plot:

Through a third-person narrator Rosario Castellanos introduces us to Cecilia Rojas; a young lady with a good social status, who is forced to move after ending her relationship with her beloved Enrique and dishonor the expectations her parent's expectations. Since Cecilia had not been able to marry and raise a traditional family at her young age, her parents felt that it was necessary for her to continue her studies in order for her to become an attractive candidate for marriage. Due to this , Cecilia goes to Mexico City to continue her studies in history within at the UNAM (Autonomous University of Mexico). Once in Mexico City, Cecilia begins a journey of new adventures and experiences that completely change her life and turn help her become an independent and mature woman. She comes across Lorenzo, who convinces her to venture to the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy at the university, where she begins to notice her desire of becoming a writer. In addition, the protagonist meets Susana, Sergio, Martin, Alberto , Fernando and Ramon who become her inseparable group of brings and her mentors. With Ramón, Cecilia sustains an affair which serves as an eye-opener in regards to her perception of relationships. At the end of the novel, Cecilia ends up becoming a complete different woman; a woman who acquires her freedom, autonomous and completely independent of choosing for the benefit of her own happiness.





# Cecilia the Captive

Cecilia saw her future reflected in the image and life of her mother; a submissive woman who managed to maintain the image of a “perfect family.” Since her childhood Cecilia's life had been predestined to fulfill the role of a proper lady in society, therefore every decision made and every step taken was done precisely to meet this expectations. So having a different future or destiny was merely an illusion.



# The Journey Towards Cecilia's Liberation

Her departure to the Mexico City opens up a door for Cecilia to finally escape from the chains that her parents had planted in her. She was now able to distance herself from the principles of society that had tied her and the social expectations that would not let her be herself.



# Cecilia the Autonomous

The captive Cecilia and the autonomous Cecilia become two separate beings. Her personal development helps her conceive a new set of ideologies. For instance, her relationship with Ramon completely changed the way she perceived the relationship between a man and a woman. She realized that being in a relationship was a matter of decision; a man was not necessary for a woman's survival and they both came together to complement each other, not simply to satisfy the needs of the man (as she had always perceived). In addition, Cecilia begins to discover herself and she is able to decide who she wants to become. She acknowledges writing as her main passion and although she understands that the road will not be easy, that she might discard several sheets of paper before writing a good story and that she will most likely do it by herself, Cecilia still decides to move forward with persistence.



# The conception of the *Bildungsroman* in Cecilia

After a long journey, Cecilia is able to meet the final outcome of the female *Bildungsroman*. She achieves her autonomy and her independence. She fully renounces to everything and everyone and decides to stay only with herself. That freedom she once did not know how to use becomes her most valuable possession. The only thing she needed was to embrace life on her own, to gain the courage for her personal growth, and to develop her own conscience. Through her, we are able to see that it is possible for a woman to distance herself from the rules imposed by society and go against them for personal benefit.



# Conclusion

Castellanos and Poniatowska criticized and show a rebellion against the social norms that affect women in Mexican society by using the concepts of the Female *Bildungsroman* in their works and showing the psychological and moral development of their characters: Cecilia Rojas and Jesusa Palancares .



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Thank You!