

Uncivil Wars, Elena Garro, Octavio Paz, and
The Battle for Cultural Memory by Sandra
Mesinger Cypess.

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 ***Uncivil Wars, Elena Garro, Octavio Paz, and The Battle for Cultural Memory by Sandra Mesinger Cypess (review)***

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

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Uncivil Wars, a book of great importance for Latin American Literature scholars, analyzes the works of two Mexican literary figures: Elena Garro and Octavio Paz. These two writers were married but their relationship had a bitter end, a fact that Cypess points out early in the book. The author implies that the divorce was caused by Paz's intolerance of Garro's defiant behavior.

Cypess chooses the theme of war, in different settings and times, as a common denominator, and each writer's portrayal of the war events in their works. The author argues that whereas Paz has cemented his place in the Latin American literary canon, Garro has not been given her rightful place in the Mexican literary canon even though they both wrote on some of the same topics. This can be seen through the paucity of articles, books, and translations of Garro's work. Cypess affirms that this could be due to the influence that Paz had on most of the critics as well as Garro's own behavior. The author also points out that Garro, although known first as "Paz's wife," had her own voice and perspective on the situation of Mexican women. This can be seen in the influence that her novels have had on young Mexican writers, especially women.

The book has five chapters and, in each one, Cypess depicts the opinions of Garro and Paz on different conflicts, ranging from the Spanish Conquest to the Tlatelolco Massacre in 1968. Chapter 1 deals with the conquest of Mexico by Hernán Cortés and his men, and how his Indian cohort, Malinche, has had a lasting influence on how Mexicans perceive themselves *vis-à-vis* foreigners. Both Paz and Garro have different views on La Malinche's role. According to Cypess, Paz's views are more typical of a Mexican male, presenting her in a sexual context, as a submissive woman who betrays her country and follows Cortez's orders. On the other hand, Garro sees La Malinche differently; she sees her as an

independent woman who voluntarily made her own choices. Moreover, Cypess questions the reason why Paz's point of view is given more validity even though he spent more time in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* explaining the word "chingada" rather than the specifics of La Malinche's actions.

Chapter 2 focuses on another important conflict, the Mexican Revolution. This major event divided not only the country but also many Mexican families into two warring sides. Cypess is quick to point out that neither Garro nor Paz lived the reality of the Revolution, but that both were influenced by their families' involvement. Paz's view, which is often seen as the final word by the Mexican intelligentsia, is to interpret this event as part of a cycle in Mexican history. According to him, even though the Revolution did not have firm philosophical moorings, it allowed Mexicans to face their history while creating a sense of a nation. Garro, on the other hand, took a different stand. She wrote about the crude reality of the Revolution, and the struggles that come with any war. She also highlighted the contributions of marginalized people, especially women and those on the losing side.

In chapter 3, Cypess examines another armed conflict, the Spanish Civil War, which took place shortly after Paz and Garro's wedding. Here she analyzes the reaction of the newly married couple to this historical event. This experience shaped the way they would write as well as their own relationship. Through interviews and articles, Cypess shows how Garro had to confront patriarchal attitudes in Spain. In fact, she was even surprised by the chauvinistic behavior of some men on the Republican side. Regarding Paz, Cypess depicts his relationship with Neruda, which foretells the future attitude of Paz towards communism. However, one begins to wonder what exactly happens with the marriage of Paz and Garro, which is something that Cypess fails to address in this chapter.

Perhaps the most...

Cypess, Sandra Mesinger. *Uncivil Wars, Elena Garro, Octavio Paz, and The Battle for Cultural Memory*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2012. Pp. 247. ISBN 978-0-292-73777-8.

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Perhaps the most important chapter is the next one, which covers a crucial event in Modern Mexican history, one that changed the lives of Paz and Garro forever: the Massacre of Tlatelolco. By the time this horrific event took place, Paz and Garro were divorced and living completely different lives. Paz had become an international figure and was an ambassador in India, while Garro had become a social activist in defense of the poor and the needy. Cypess does a magnificent



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