

Marian Womack and Jennifer Wood (eds)

Beyond the Back Room



New Perspectives on Carmen Martín Gaité

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Foreword

This is the story of the people who say ‘no’. Carmen Martín Gaité wrote it before she left us. A ‘no’ can be as small as a ring, or as large as the crown of a tree. It can be something extremely difficult, or only slightly difficult. But a ‘no’ always makes us disappear, like in novels, like in the news. There is a whole world of things that don’t happen: even if we don’t know them, the things that don’t happen, the actions that are not performed, these are the trestles that really support a country. That’s why sometimes there are countries that are unstable, or fragile; that’s what happens when, behind hundreds of ‘yeses’, there is nothing that you say ‘no’ to.

Carmen Martín Gaité said ‘no’ to many things. She said ‘no’ discreetly: there are people who think that you can’t wear bright hats and be discreet, but that’s not true. Discretion demands an effort of memory. Carmen Martín Gaité had prestige; she sold many books; her work was studied by hispanists around the globe. She was what many authors, male and female, want to become, but nevertheless it is worthwhile to start thinking about what she wasn’t. What she could have been, but chose not to be. What she did not get up in the morning and think that she might want to become. What she was not, the places she did not visit, the parties where you never saw her, the literary prizes she did not judge, the rigged prizes she did not win, the institutions she did not want to belong to no matter how much they insisted, the TV shows she did not appear on, the media groups she did not want to gift with her presence or her words, the commissions she did not accept, the questions she did not answer, the favours she did not ask.

This is the story of the people who say ‘no’. Even if we don’t think about it too often, this is the most public story that exists. Saying ‘no’ is the most public action one can take, perhaps because it is the only thing

no one talks about. A 'yes' is something more private. A public figure like Carmen Martín Gaité produced hundreds of thousands of private 'yeses'. 'Yes' to writing a dedication, 'yes' to each afternoon spent with one of her books, the 'yes' that lived in her loyalty and her poems, her articles, the questions she answered after a conference. As Miguel Hernández wrote, 'You will only find Délia everywhere.'

You will only find Carmen Martín Gaité in many different places. The 'yes' she showed us with her bravery, the 'yes' of support she gave to new authors, the 'yes' she offered a new author and her first novel, her generosity with her name in all her interviews and to all her translators when she travelled, the long conversations she had without being afraid of what anybody thought of her, her inauguration of a library in an adult education centre under threat from the council, her gifts of a hug and of a little china sledge and a lantern. Yes, yes, yes.¹

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