

Clavicle

Clavícula

Presented by: Magda Potok

In *Clavícula*, the central focus of the book revolves around unexplained and sudden bodily pain. The narrative begins with the main character (identified from the first moment with the author: Marta Sanz) experiencing discomfort in the clavicle area during an extended flight across the Atlantic. The examination of this pain alludes to personal situations such as menopause, family financial struggles, the husband's unemployment, as well as the broader community and their silent suffering.

As the main character tries to understand and deal with this mysterious pain, it leads to profound reflections on the societal stigma surrounding mental health, anxiety as a pathology of advanced capitalism, the illnesses and pains that specifically affect women, and the over-exploitation and fear of poverty that disproportionately impact women. The pain is regarded as a valid component of literary expression, one that cannot be disregarded or silenced by the pressure to maintain a positive outlook or feelings of guilt.

The central theme of this text explores unspoken suffering and the act of narrating this pain. Two significant aspects are emphasised: making suffering visible and sharing it. The pain is linked ideologically to challenging economic circumstances and the experience of menopause, often distorted in public and literary discourse. This combination leads to stress problems, including panic attacks and anxiety disorders.

The narrative primarily focuses on the suffering of a woman, challenging the societal expectation of perpetual happiness prevalent in advanced capitalist societies. Acknowledging suffering and sadness is often frowned upon, laden with guilt and shame. The protagonist grapples with this ideology, recognising the guilt her pain imposes, yet subverting the imperative of health, beauty, and self-control by displaying her vulnerable and pained body. She demands to be heard and seeks recognition for the pain she grapples with, urging others to listen and empathise.

The narrative approach raises the question of the legitimacy of complaint. Sanz views complaining as a moral and political issue, asserting the right to express dissatisfaction in a world that often mandates overcoming adversity with a smile and viewing crises as opportunities. The denial of complaint, justified by comparing one's situation to others worse off, is seen as a strategy to stifle political engagement and undermine critical consciousness.

Marta Sanz employs her artistic expression to contemplate societal norms and physical experiences, giving her own discomfort collective and allegorical significance. Through this lens, manifestations within her body are interpreted as a diagnosis of a society deeply influenced by precariousness, inequality, exclusion, and imposition of individualistic and often superficial positive thinking.

Material conditions of life hold substantial weight within this narrative, especially the heightened precariousness exacerbated by crises and governmental policies. Gender and class disparities prominently feature, further amplifying the vulnerability of certain groups to harm. Women, in particular, face disproportionately higher rates of unemployment, engage in lower-paying jobs, and bear the burden of unpaid care work. This starkly highlights the vulnerability of human bodies to structural violence, underscoring that we all exist as susceptible entities within a system. Sanz' work constructs a bridge between her personal crisis and the broader social crisis that encompasses us all.

The text advocates for the expression of all forms of pain and challenges the dominance of a culture that emphasises health and happiness. It urges a more empathetic and collective approach to confronting pain. The female body emerges as a potent symbol, illustrating how societal structures influence our physicality and identity, emphasising the interconnectedness of all individuals and the importance of mutual care over isolation.

In a narrative sense, this text exudes a striking originality—a true embodiment of a 21st-century novel, a genre in transformation, mixing heterogeneous components, such as fiction, essay, chronicle, diary entries, photography, electronic correspondence, dreams and confessions. Marta Sanz carries out formal experimentation: the variety of narratives and the jumps from one subject to another reflect the narrator's unease. The shifting and fragmented structure of the story corresponds to the disintegration of the body and the painful state of the subject.

This novel is markedly autobiographical, with an intimate self deeply rooted in her social and public position. The author writes from her personal perspective: a Spanish woman, left-wing, heterosexual, middle-class, with proletarian roots, residing in an urban environment. In this story, she describes her intimate experiences during the years of her own suffering, sharing her pains, traumas, unfulfilled desires and economic struggles. The narrative, told from the perspective of the self, aspires to universalise the particular, bringing the private into the public. This approach aims to contextualise personal issues within the economic and political systems that condition them.

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Storytelling

The Political Novel: A Palimpsest

By: Ivana Perica