

El cuerpo del deseo

antología de poesía erótica femenina



Valeria Manca

ficción

The Body of Desire

Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska states that the majority of women use literature as a form of therapy. "We revert to writing to liberate ourselves, empty ourselves, explain ourselves to the world and to understand what is happening to us". And we would have to add that literature is also used by women to understand themselves in the most intimate dimension that the living and thinking human being possess: erotic imagination.

Through literature women have been able to see their image reflected in the mirror of words and have discovered their thought and spirit. From the battle that such renowned authors as Virginia Woolf or Simone de Beauvoir have won for their gender and earned a place and universal recognition for their works, we have new generations of women writers who are recovering their original identity through the body. This is not surprising if we think about women - they are made of much more tangible material than men. And they are more capable of understanding their condition - as poet Carmen Boullosa says - "obliged by the inevitable rule of the biological functions, (women are) marvelously body unto death". Thus it is natural that an almost intrinsic characteristic of feminine literature is an allusion to this theme.

In Mexico women writers have approached erotic poetry from different angles and nuances. But in general, up to the 1940's, erotic poetry was covered up by a certain mystical air and its tone, normally mournful, presented the body as a burden or as the principal motive behind sin. What

vision can women have about themselves in a society that marginalizes them?

Fortunately in the last thirty years Mexican feminine poetry has changed from this type of intimate lamentation to a joyful and uninhibited expression. Though this phenomenon is not completely unknown, it is fairly new. In the introduction to *El Cuerpo del Deseo* (The Body of Desire), Valeria Manca talks about the growing number of women poets who have made eroticism one of the principal sources of inspiration for their work. In this anthology, the Italian author Valeria Manca chooses the texts of only 22 poets born between 1943 and 1960 (and she misses some). However, the perceptive selection offers a diverse panorama of feminine eroticism that in its constant re-creation broadens its limits and can be recognized by its contrary. The poets included in the book are trying to take a new look at the

theme - a look that is not without pain but that is more serene and ready to place all bets on pleasure.

For one of the poets, eroticism is not only a form of knowledge through the specific continent of the skin, but "a way to fight and overcome the daily traps of life". (Frida Virginia Ramos). For another writer it permits her to broaden "the frontiers of language and pass from a monologue to a dialogue that aspires to be converted in the end into a polyphony where we all express ourselves" (Iliana Godoy). Another poet states that it permits her to internalize in the being of man and "talk about him as the object of erotic enjoyment" (Isabel Quinones). But almost all the authors coincide with the fact that this type of poetry shows a radical change of attitude not only in relationship to literature but also with life and society. "We women have recovered our body and all

that we live through it" (Monica Mansour).

Even though Mexican lyrics of today more critically reflect the spirit of a conflictive period of economic ups and downs, we can find a certain enjoyment for living in feminine poetry. We can find a strong consciousness about women themselves, about their own bodies and about all that flows from this. Although there is a predominance of free verse, this does not mean there is a lack of precision in the texts. Just as there are those who portray the most common ordinary things, there are also those who write in a more allegoric sense. They never, however, leave the sphere of the corporal nor do they hurry over the soft delight of their intimate geography.

Even though it has limitations (it covers just two generations of poets and excludes those who have not published a book) *El Cuerpo del Deseo* is a fine document about poetic work on a national level. It does not suffer from excesses as do other anthologies nor does it become a feminist argument. In the choice of theme (eroticism) we can find more points of encounter with the universe of what is "masculine" than unreconcilable differences. Fortunately it includes such young writers as Silvia Tomasa Rivera, Marcela Fuentes, Angelica de Icaza and Andrea Montiel, who, though they have been passed over by more meticulous research, represent a generation that is at the high point of its creative production. In any of their poems it is desire that dictates the words that are metamorphosed in the end by the indescribable body that we inhabit.

El Cuerpo del Deseo
(The Body of Desire)
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