

BOOKS

IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY

"Las escritoras mexicanas de este siglo gozan de una fama ambigua: sus nombres son muy conocidos, de ellas se afirma que están entre los mejores narradores de México, hasta se llega a sostener que varias de ellas superan en talento literario a algunos escritores de fama internacional. Sin embargo, sus obras son poco leídas, menos aún estudiadas" (Mexican women writers of this century enjoy an ambiguous reputation: their names are very well known, they are claimed to be among the greatest commentators on Mexico, several of them are even claimed to be greater literary talents than some writers of international fame. Nevertheless, their work is rarely read, never mind studied). So writes Fabienne Bradu in the introduction to her book of essays titled **Señas Particulares: escritora** (Special Characteristics: Woman Writer).

This work attempts to conjure up the contradictory fate that Mexican women writers suffer. Elena Garro, Inés Arredondo, Josefina Vicens, Julieta Campos, Rosario Castellanos, Luisa Josefina Hernández and María Luis Puga, —seven of the best Mexican women writers of this century— are brought together by Bradu in a detailed reading of their works, in a reflection that purposely declares itself separate from the themes generally touched in literature written by women. In this book the reader will not uncover the intention of underlining only one voice as the embodiment of the "feminine" or that represents the different transformations in the history of the emancipation of women.

Without making erudite or vindictory claims, these essays offer, on the contrary, as their main point, a demonstration of the unmistakable quality of each one of these voices she has studied: the search for an imaginary or ideal identity; a theme which although it is not the exclusive property of women, is present in their artistic creations, particularly those of an acute and

anguished order. Nevertheless, Bradu states: "La femineidad no es propiedad exclusiva de las mujeres, afortunadamente" (Fortunately, femininity is not the exclusive property of women).

Bradu's work shows us that, although the main thread of her essays is the search for identity in the literary creations of the authors under study, this does not mean that she is attempting to offer a uniform vision, but on the contrary, to show, in each case, the variety which each one brings to her creation.

Elena Garro (1920). Author of various works, among which are "Los recuerdos del porvenir" (Memories of the Future), "La Semana de Colores" (The week of colors) and "Andamos huyendo, Lola" (We're running away, Lola), she offers a literary treatment illustrating at the same time a concept of power, and the position she takes with regard to this. The theme of power is, in the works of Elena Garro, one of interest and preoccupation holding,



simultaneously, a fascination and a repulsion for the author. Bradu states that "un espíritu de rebelión recorre el mundo novelesco de Elena Garro y la creación literaria es, para ella, una suerte de compensación o corrección de una realidad....que no acaba nunca de aceptar y que repudia a través de o gracias a sus ficciones" (a spirit of rebellion runs through the novelesque world of Elena Garro, and literary creation for her is a kind of compensation for, or correction of, reality.... which she will never accept, and that she rejects through or thanks to her fictions). She also mentions that the author used literary sources of "magic realism" before, and many times better than, some writers who made this into a product for exportation of Latin American literature.

Inés Arredondo (1928). Author of *La señal*, (The sign), *Río subterráneo* (Underground river) and *Opus 123* she presents, through a transparent writing style, a theme that is constant in all of her work: that of passionate love, *l'amour*

fou. Other underlying themes in her texts are those of madness; purity in or towards perversity; the "avoided possibility" (of incest, for example); and the "look of love", either of recognition of what has been lost, or that which only last some moments and soothes ancient wounds.

The work of Josefina Vicens (1911) comprising of two novels: *El libro vacío* (The Empty Book) and *Los años falsos* (The False Years), occupy a special position in Mexico. Much of this is due, as well as to its individual merit, to its antecedents, or lack of them, in Mexican narratives. For example, she achieves the paradox of being able to enter, in the last instance, a classification such as that of the "social novel", yet maintaining an intimate tone, subjective for excellence.

In the maps drawn in the works of Julieta Campos (1932 —maps of desire and of death— circularity, by antonomasia, would be the form that is desired and feared at the same time. In her work, among which we find "Muerte por agua" (Death by water) and "Celina y los gatos" (Celina and the cats), nothing is static, in spite of first impressions. Only particular attention, a patient, fixed and anxious study such as shown by the narrator, can uncover the movements and subtle changes that are almost invariably a threat to survival: of the world, of things, of beings, of love.

Critics of the work of Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974) appear to have reached agreement: that it is eminently autobiographical, or rather, that the life of Rosario Castellanos, is a presence, a theme and a circumstance that cuts across her work in all of the varieties she has practised: poetry, novels, short stories and magazine articles. Some would see this intervention of life in her work as a human quality; others as a limitation that makes literature excessively subjective. What is true is that the autobiographical commentary in the work of Rosario Castellanos is like a sort of mirror play between the groups where she achieves simultaneously an affirmation and a negation of the autobiographical source, disguise or displacement, as occurs in her novel *Balún Canán*. As Bradu states: "La verdadera Rosario Castellanos está y quedará en su obra, a un tiempo desgarrada y reunida en sus contradicciones y en su enorme deseo de ser" (The real Rosario Castellanos is and will remain in her work, in a time torn up and rejoined in her contradictions and enormous desire to be).

The extensive work of Luisa Josefina Hernández (1928) divides itself in two: drama and the novel. To this writer, creator of *La plaza de Puerto Santo* (The Square in Puerto Santo) and *El valle que elegimos* (The valley we chose), among other things, Mexico is a vast stage where the same dramas are enacted, disguised as comedies or tragedies. Her

personages are actors in their own lives, in search of an unachievable authenticity.

This is how, to Luisa Josefina Hernández, there exists a difference between the representation of being and the representation of appearing. In this difference lies the whole problem of authenticity.

Preoccupation with the theme of alterability marks all of the work of María Luisa Puga (1944): the Other is always present, because to her it means the different modes of the why and for whom (or against whom) of writing. Nevertheless, the establishment of identity through writing scarcely acquires, in the work of María Luisa Puga, the characteristics of the directly autobiographical account. To become "another", or take another to write one's own history, are the gestures that the personages of "Las posibilidades del odio" (The Possibilities of Hate), of "Cuando el aire es azul" (When the air is blue) and "Pánico o peligro" (Panic or Danger) repeat, in a sort of imitative homage to their creator.

Seven voices, seven choruses that seize the interior reality of woman, of being, of the Mexican, and that manage to elevate themselves and make themselves universal: that is what is offered in the essays of Fabienne Bradu.

Bradu, Fabienne. **Señas Particulares: Escritora**. (Special Characteristics: Woman Writer). FCE, México, 1987, 138

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