

## BOOKS

POETRY:  
NEW WOMEN'S  
VOICES

"I took a close look with enthusiasm at the poetry which was being written by young Mexican women today. I found myself full of resignation, sadness and an existential chaos of the present. During my long research I realized that the young women poets were more conscious of themselves, they were more aware of their own bodies. For women poets, erotic poetry is a more real interpretation of love poetry." Italian researcher Valeria Manca who spent more than a year working on a poetry anthology of young women and eroticism made the above observation in a recent interview published in the Mexican newsweekly, *Proceso*.

The growing interest in the literature of Mexico's youth and in particular young women writers, is an accurate reflection of the proliferation of new voices which have been shaping the literary world in the last decades.

Proof of this is the volume *Caligrafía de Ariadna* which unites the most recent books of five young women poets all born between 1951 and 1962: Julieta Arteaga, María Ángeles Juárez, Perla Schwartz, Marianne Toussaint and Aura María Vidales.

The poet Raúl Renan reveals the contents of this collective book in his attempt to understand the work of the five women: "To say they follow the tradition of the best female writers would come closest to an elementary judgment. Yet it would add nothing to an understanding of this new poetry which rises legitimately from the interior of the poetic spirit. One of the authors registers the feeling of separation experienced in being a mother (Perla Schwartz). Another, begins with the poet's natural state: solitude, even though she appears to renounce it in her love poetry (Julieta Arteaga). Another, with the sensitive touch of a lover, gives us a sensual version of love (Ángeles Juárez).

The next looks at the course of life through a veil of bitterness (Marianne Toussaint). Yet another confronts the enigma of the mystery of what is and what is not and proposes a revelation (Aura María Vidales)."

Elsa Cross, a poet and a contemporary of the five writers, stated in a review of *Caligrafía de Ariadna*. "Three of them, Arteaga, Juárez and Schwartz deal with very clear, uniform themes in a consistent way. At times it almost seems to be a chronicle, a poetic diary. In the case of Julieta Arteaga, the theme is loneliness. Sadness is omnipresent in her poems. In the same way, but with different symbols, the theme of abandonment which suddenly bursts into María Ángeles Juárez's book does not alter in any way the amorous and erotic pace which is found throughout. Perla Schwartz deals in a very moving way with a theme little touched upon by Mexican



women poets, that of motherhood." Elsa Cross says that Marianne Toussaint's poetry appears to be more intangible and complex. It is not external events which guide and conform the writing of the poem. On the contrary, it is an internal matter which through language seeks to settle in external forms." In Aura María Vidales's poetry "there is a romantic vitality in the classical sense of the word" and "a delicateness of perception and expression which suggests much more than it says, for example, in the image of a young girl who/ will leave/ her eyes/ in the darkness, a very beautiful image which reflects her book."

The recurring themes in the voices of these authors become apparent in the verses they have created: loneliness in Arteaga's poems: "It is true what they say out there/ solitude has no name/ you can take it or leave it —at will," eroticism and abandonment in Juárez's poetry: "I think of you, Manuel/ your eyes/ which

flee my mind/ like a handful of gray birds/ which carry oblivion in their wings;" the complicity and wrench of motherhood in Schwartz: "You are a drop which will become/ a cascade/ nine months will go by/ and you will be a flood;" the course of life and the rediscovery of its origins in Toussaint's book: "I want to be: at the point/ in the center/ at the departure;" the delicate perception of what is and what is not in Vidales's look: "That man/ was not mine/ but his eyes/ looked as if they were mine."

Sadness, abandonment, eroticism as awareness and loss, existential chaos, search and solitude are some of the themes these authors touch upon. They all reveal, because of their youth or in spite of it, great sensitivity and solidity in their work.

Arteaga, Julieta; Juárez, María Angeles; Schwartz, Perla; Toussaint, Marianne; Vidales, Aura María. **Caligrafía de Ariadna**. Ediciones de Punto de Partida UNAM, 1987. 112 pages.

AN  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
HISTORY  
OF MEXICO

This environmental history of Mexico sets out to write a new kind of story: not the usual history of conquests, wars, revolutions, discoveries, possessions, colonizations and so on, but one about and with Nature. The story is told by Nature, who talks about "my environment" and "my eco-systems" and tells how in the past tens of thousands of years humans have become a planetary threat.

The story begins when humans first arrived in America some 70,000 years ago — "when men did not confront my forces, but adapted themselves to them" — and arrived in what is now Mexico around 25,000 years ago. Then the story of survival: hunting ("I'll never forget those occasions when some group managed to capture a mammoth"), food collection, the making of tools, the use of fire, and human's intents to understand natural phenomena.

Later came the development of agriculture — "one of the most dramatic moments of my existence" adds Nature— when Mexicans began to cultivate corn, chile, pumpkin, avocado, maguey, nopales, cocoa and amaranth.

There were "abrupt changes" for Nature following the arrival of the Spanish: "I remember with great sorrow the years which followed... the indigenous population was brutally robbed and exploited" and 60 years after the Coquest

the native population was reduced by two-thirds, due mainly to epidemics.

The Spanish also brought new plants and animals to Mexico, causing changes in Nature's eco-systems. Forests and mines were exploited more intensively, new methods of production and distribution were implemented. Nature then relates the development of the Industrial Age in the 19th century, the Urbanization, from 1940 to 1980, finally arriving to the Age of Crisis, 1980 to 1986. Nature claims that the impoverishment of important parts of the society, is the result of the impoverishment of Nature.

She summarizes some points of Mexico's current environmental crisis: soil erosion, deforestation, overexploitation and exhaustion of non-renewable resources, air pollution and the decrease in the quality and quantity of water supplies.

The book's 366 pages are filled with interesting ecological and anthropological information. Nature's story is backed up by many illustrations from historical sources, as well as precise information on a variety of subjects, ranging from the Ice Age to modern industrial accidents.

"*Tierra Profanada*" is not apocalyptic in tone, but it is finally, apocalyptic in message. Nature calls on humans to "change the exploitative relationship between you and me ...if not, I'll have to continue alone the infinite path of the Universe." She warns against the dangers of nuclear accidents, referring to Chernobyl and Three Mile Island, and to the construction of Mexico's first nuclear plant in Laguna Verde, Veracruz: "I've seen volcanic convulsions and unions of the oceans, but a nuclear accident could shake me up in my most intimate insides."

Finally she reminds us that she has known many other species which disappeared after being unable to adapt to changes produced by crisis. "Remember what happened to the dinosaurs," she warns.

Valuable annexes at the end of the book include lists of "critical incidents in the environmental deterioration in Mexico", as well as an extensive bibliography. *Tierra Profanada* is fascinating reading material, told in accessible language and full of life. The group of researchers and writers led by Fernando Ortiz Monasterio have made a valuable contribution not only in the field of Mexican ecological history, but to our understanding of the relationship between Nature and Society.

**Tierra Profanada: Historia Ambiental de México:** Fernando Ortiz Monasterio et al. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Ecología, Colección Divulgación. México, 1987.