



Territorio de leonas. Cartografía de narradoras mexicanas en los noventa

(Land of Lionesses. Cartography of Mexican Women Writers in the 1990s)

Ana Rosa Domenella, comp.

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The Diana Morán-Coyoacán Literary Theory and Criticism Workshop, which has dedicated several collective books to the literary production of Mexican and Latin American women writers, now publishes a new collection of literary criticism under the title *Territorio de leonas. Cartografía de narradoras mexicanas en los noventa* (Land of Lionesses. Cartography of Mexican Women Writers in the 1990s).

The epigraph that opens the book makes it clear that, “There are lions here,” was a warning of fifteenth-century cartographers about unexplored territories. The title of the book implies, then, “Beware!” The subtitle is more reassuring, informing us that the essays are a map of what the writers published in the final decade of the last century.

The book’s name inevitably brings to mind a fragment of the poem “A Gloria” (To Gloria) that Salvador Díaz Mirón published in *El Diario del Hogar* (The Home Daily) in 1884:

*Reconcile yourself, woman! We have come
To this overwhelming vale of tears,
You, as the dove for the nest,
And I, as the lion for the wars!*¹

The poet’s perspective is undoubtedly male, but women’s point of view was not very different, as can be seen in the classic *Antología de Poetisas Mexicanas* (Anthology of Mexican Poetesses) compiled by José María Vigil in 1893, published by the National Autonomous University of Mexico in a facsimile edition in 1977. Here, for example, in a poem called “A mi hija” (To My Daughter), Mrs. Mateana Murguía de Aveleyra resorts to images like the following:

*Bright butterfly of a thousand colors
That lives in the cavern of my loves...*

*Your sweet accent always reaches my ear
Like the tender sigh of the gentle wind
Like the cooing of a warbling turtle-dove.*²

A better known author, Josefa Murilla, begins her poem “A Emma Hernández” (To Emma Hernández) with the lines, “You are the swallow that takes flight/through the flowered field when the sky is/clear and blue.”³

Birds and butterflies are the recurring images nineteenth-century women poets use in the anthology. So, when the authors of the Diana Morán-Coyoacán Workshop think about the writers they have analyzed, implicitly looking at themselves as lionesses, they make the change in sensibility from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth very clear. The advance of women’s awareness toward independence is tangible.

Our guide through these unknown territories is Ana Rosa Domenella, the collection’s editor. She quotes the

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collective’s declaration of principles, in the words of Hélène Cixous: “Women must write themselves, write about women and make women write.” Domenella introduces the book’s contents, pointing to the changes in Latin American literature in the 1980s. While literary production was headed up by white male writers from what Ángel Rama called “the lettered city,” the 1980s saw extensive production of political novels, and women writers were emerging as protagonists. Other groups, like homosexuals and ethnic minorities, marginalized from the dominant culture and the halls of power also began to make their work known.

The editor explains women’s writing in the light of the end-of-century atmosphere defined by postmodernism, the unfolding of technology and “lite” literature. She comments on the work of some of the authors not included in the volume and summarizes the history of the group of scholars who wrote the essays.

Thirteen authors wrote the book’s 26 essays: in alphabetical order, they are Enid Álvarez, Blanca L. Ansoleaga, María de la Luz Becerra Zamora, Maricruz Castro Ricalde, Laura Cázares H., Ana Rosa Domenella, Luzelena Gutiérrez de Velasco, Graciela Martínez-Zalce, Nora Pasternac, Gloria Prado G., Berenice Romano Hurtado, Ute Seydel and Luz Elena Zamudio Rodríguez.

This is not a compilation of articles written willy-nilly, but a book conceived as collective from its inception: the researchers shared the whole process of producing the book; they met regularly, discussed the topics, came to agreements on theoretical perspectives, refined thinking and reviewed final drafts. This means that within the context of different studies, common threads of thought can be discerned in the articles: an interest in exploring women’s writing, a free assimilation of the tenets of feminist literary criticism, translated into the search for the marks of gender on each work, as well as those of so-called cultural studies.

After the introduction, the book is divided into five parts organized by the dates of birth of the authors analyzed, each coordinated by one of the scholars.

The first part includes essays on two writers born in the Roaring Twenties, Elena Garro and Carmen Rosenweig, who wrote, respectively, the short novel *Inés* and *Volanteo* (Leafletting).

The second part deals with authors born in the arid 1930s. The book of short stories *Alta costura* (Haute Couture), by Beatriz Espejo; the novel *Apariciones* (Apparitions), by Margo Glantz; *Fuimos es mucha gente* (“We Were” Is Too Many People), by María Luisa Mendoza; the novel *La noche de las hormigas* (The Night of the Ants), by Aline Pettersson, are all analyzed. Three essays deal with important works by Angelina Muñoz-Huberman: *Castillos en la tierra* (Castles in the Earth), *El mercader de Tudela* (The Merchant of Tudela) and *Las confidentes* (The Confidants). The section closes with a comparison of autobiographical works by Pettersson and Espejo.

Writers who came into the world in the 1940s —Brianda Domecq, Ángeles Mastretta, María Luisa Puga and Silvia Molina— occupy the following section. It offers a study on *La insólita historia de la Santa de Cábora* (The Unusual Story of the Saint of Cábora) by Domecq, and another on *Mal de amores* (Lovers’ Malaise) by Mastretta. The section closes with an essay comparing Puga’s *Inventar ciudades* (Inventing Cities) with Molina’s *El amor que me juraste* (The Love You Swore to Me).

Longer, with seven essays, suggesting more literary production by women, the fourth group includes five writers and a cinematographer born in the 1950s. Three of Sabina Berman's novels are analyzed (*La bobbe* [Granny], *Un grano de arroz* [A Grain of Rice] and *Amante de lo ajeno* [The Crook], and two of Carmen Boulosa's (*Duerme* [Go to Sleep] and *Cielos de la tierra* [Heavens of the Earth]). Other articles look at Mónica Lavín's *Cambio de vías* (Change of Track) and Beatriz Novaro's *Cecilia todavía* (Still Cecilia), as well as Beatriz and María Novaro's script of the film *Lola*. The section closes with a study of Paloma Villegas's *La luz oblicua* (The Slanting Light).

The last section deals with authors born in the 1960s and 1970s. It includes articles about the novels *La corte de los ilusos* (The Court of the Deluded), by Rosa Beltrán; *Una manera de morir* (A Way of Dying), by Vizania Amezcua; *Y si yo fuera Susana San Juan...* (And If I Were Susana San Juan...) by Susana Pagano; and *Púrpura* (Purple) by Ana

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García Bergua. Others deal with the books of stories *El imaginador* (The Imaginer), also by Ana García Bergua; *Cuentos para ciclistas y jinetes* (Stories for Cyclists and Horsemen) by Adriana González Mateos; *Técnicamente humanos, Invencciones enfermas* (Technically Human, Sick Inventions) by Cecilia Eudave; and *Antología de miradas* (Anthology of Glances) by Berenice Romano.

Seen as a whole, the number and variety of topics dealt with by the authors is enormously rich: they range from the material reality of bodies and detectable geographical areas to worlds of fantasy; from history to magic; from the boundless font of autobiography to the labyrinths of writing. They touch on birth, identity, memory and death in a kaleidoscope that reinvents itself again and again.

The essayists are interested in presenting, describing and understanding each text, looking into the intertextualities, describing legacies and establishing thematic or generation-

al parameters. Almost all the essays—and to a lesser extent the introduction—display a kind of renunciation of placing a qualitative value on the texts analyzed or situating them in a hierarchy of comparison. Perhaps this renunciation is due to the fact that established literary criticism has almost always been highly ideological. This desire to identify with the texts, to understand them more than to judge them, allows us to speak in terms of anti-authoritarian criticism. I think, however, that later on, it will be necessary to develop criteria for evaluating and refining certain value judgments that have barely been sketched here, and judging the place of the different writers in the overall scheme of Mexican literature, perhaps trying to resituate them.

Lands of Lionesses is a contribution to the study of contemporary Mexican literature. Today, we can learn something about what women and men writers published in the 1990s, and even in the 1980s, through newspaper articles, particularly reviews, essays in specialized journals and university theses, but there are still no systematic, panoramic studies. The usefulness, then, of a book like this is clear, since it offers a mosaic of articles about over 20 writers, ranging from the well-established to others who are more or less marginal, providing an overview.

The essayists' empathy with the texts they analyze and the studies' anti-authoritarianism imply the intent to communicate with the novelists and short story writers themselves. I think that the whole makes it possible to appreciate the recurring themes—as well as those left out—in the writing of women in the 1990s and will be of great interest to the writers producing today. It also opens up a dialogue, of course, with readers, both specialists and everyone interested in literature written by women, as well as in the development of end-of-century Mexican narrative in general.

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NOTES

¹ Salvador Díaz Mirón, "A Gloria," *Poesía Completa*, Manuel Sol, ed. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica), p. 314.

² José Ma. Vigil, ed., *Poetisas mexicanas, siglos XVI, XVII, XVIII y XIX* facsimile edition (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1977), pp. 137-138.

³ José Ma. Vigil, op. cit., p. 191.