

Aquella Luz, la que estremece.
The Light That Makes Us Tremble
 Nela Rio (Hugh Hazelton, trans.)
 Broken Jaw Press-Enana Blanca
 Montreal, 2008, 96 pp.

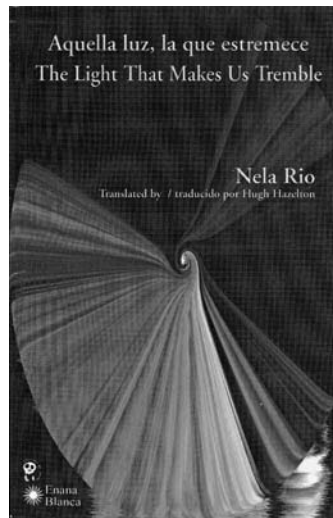
NELA RIO'S FEMININE EROTIC POETRY

"Before reading *The Light That Makes Us Tremble*, you have to find a quiet spot: perhaps a room with a soft, natural light, or a place beneath the huge spreading arms of a flowering tree where you can read it out loud.... [It] demands an absolute respect...[and] requires both time and silence."

This scripted suggestion for the reader written by Marjorie Agosín in her introduction to this bilingual collection of romantic-erotic poems by Nela Rio proposes certain requirements she considers basic for the greater enjoyment of these 24 poems.

Whether they be read in the original Spanish (on the left hand side of the page), or in English, the language into which Hugh Hazelton has translated them magnificently (on the right hand side of the page), the experience is liable to be deliciously evocative, tremulous and very possibly intensely moving. A bilingual reading will inevitably lure the reader into mirror-worlds that reverberate to differing cadences, entrancing in their rich array. In this sense, pleasure is increased when the interweaving of the poet-voice and the translator-voice are able to create yet another dialogue for the reader to delight in.

Argentinian-born Latina-Canadian poet, writer and artist Nela Rio has published eight collections of poetry, among them *En las noches que desvisten otras noches/During Nights That Undress Other Nights*, *Túnel de Proa Verde/Tunnel of the Green Prow*, and *Cuerpo amado/Beloved Body* (Emma Egea International Poetry Award, Spain), as well as creative fiction, such as that contained in *El espacio de la luz/The Space of Light*. Her academic focus as professor of Hispanic language and literature has been on several topics, such as testimonial literature and erotic poetry, in addition to a special interest in Sor Leonor de Ovando,



the first (sixteenth-century) poet of the Americas. Actively involved in Hispanic-Canadian cultural and literary issues, she is president of the Registro Creativo for the Canadian Association of Hispanists/Asociación Canadiense de Hispanistas and has organized many cultural and literary events, such as the International Poster Poems by Contemporary Ibero-american Poets, as well as the virtual exhibition of art and poetry Outspoken Art/

Arte Claro.

The English version of the poems is by Hugh Hazelton, an award-winning translator (2006 Governor General's Literary Award for Translation), who has previously translated Nela Rio's poetry (*Túnel de proa verde/Tunnel of the Green Prow* and *Cuerpo amado/Beloved Body*). He is clearly attuned to the dune lands and fresh spring waters of these poems that he is in more than one way re-writing, an activity translators engage in when offering the reader a landscape of similar soft hues and hazes as that of the pristine original. Hazelton is also the author of "Eros and Thanatos in the Work of Nela Rio" contained in his book of essays: *Latinocanada: A Critical Study of Ten Latin American Writers of Canada*.

Originally published in Spanish (Madrid: Ediciones Torremozas, 1992), *The Light That Makes Us Tremble* was finalist for the VIII Premio Carmen Conde de Poesía de Mujeres, Madrid, Spain, (1991) and has been translated into French (*Cette lumière, celle qui fait frémir*). It has also been included in courses at several universities in the U.S. and Canada. The publication of the present bilingual version can be regarded as a good omen—despite this happening several years after the Spanish original was gifted to the general public—as an indicator that bilingual editions are becoming more acceptable and more common nowadays, which many readers are sure to appreciate.

Nela Rio's *The Light That Makes Us Tremble* is defined as "luminous" by Marjorie Agosín. Dedicated quite simply "To the one who brought love," these evocative erotic poems illumine love in its most intimate, breathtaking and breath-giving light:

Amado,
 buscaré los hilos
 del manto de la noche solitaria,
 iré hilando los quejidos por ti, ausente,
 y cuando vuelvas
 haré que laboriosamente destejas cada lágrima
 hasta que desnudes de tristezas
 la noche que no te vio.

“Su presencia me es dulce al paladar”

My love,
 I will look for threads
 from the cloak of the lonely night,
 and will keep spinning moans for you,
 and when you return
 I will have you painstakingly unravel each tear
 till you undress your absent night
 of all its sadness.

“His presence is sweet to my taste”

In these candid poems, flowing and springwater-fresh, can be heard a subjective voice that is at every moment, and in every movement, feminine. As Clara Román-Odio points out, these poems “invite us to peruse the feminine erotic experience through a yearning subject.” In addition, they offer, often overtly, the not-so-usual erotic perspective of a mature feminine subject:

Cuando pensé
 que mi cuerpo era crepuscular
 olvidaba

 que el amor no está atado
 al ciclo mitológico del tiempo
 que es una mentira fabricada
 que desmiente
 esta explosión de naufragio
 y de espigas saturadas

“Las estaciones son ficciones”

When I thought
 that my body was twilight
 I forgot
 ...
 that love is not tied
 to the mythological cycle of time
 which is a fabricated lie
 refuted by
 this explosion of shipwreck
 and saturated ears of grain

“The Seasons Are Fictions”

These poems also lead the reader on a journey of “vivifying discovery that reveals... the exiles of Eden who, through bodily love, learn to abandon themselves to time and the cosmos as they aspire to unity between body and spirit,” as Román-Odio writes. In “Genesis,” for instance, Nela Rio evokes an indigenous version of Edenic-idyllic origins:

Encontró a Ascalic
 fatigado en su búsqueda de la luz y de la vida.
 Nurimbá lo invitó a su cuerpo y le dio ambas.
 Tomados de la mano
 caminando lado a lado
 entraron juntos al campo
 y se amaron en el génesis.

She found Ascalic
 exhausted by his search for light and life.
 Nurimbá invited him to her body and gave him both.
 Hand in hand
 walking side by side
 they went together into the field
 and loved each other in genesis.

In *Aquella Luz, la que estremece/The Light That Makes Us Tremble*, poet Nela Rio offers a flowing “chiaroscuro”—a term Spanish poet Francisco Pino used in referring to the essence of poetry itself—nestled into an erotic landscaping of intense and vulnerably delicate murmurings. The poems collected in this volume illuminate flitting shadows to reveal and hide, suggest and expose, open and close, tide and swell, the loving and erotic perceptions of a female subject willing to share the elusiveness of loving, tactile and profound moments with utmost luminous grace. **NM**

Claire Joysmith
 Researcher at CISAN