

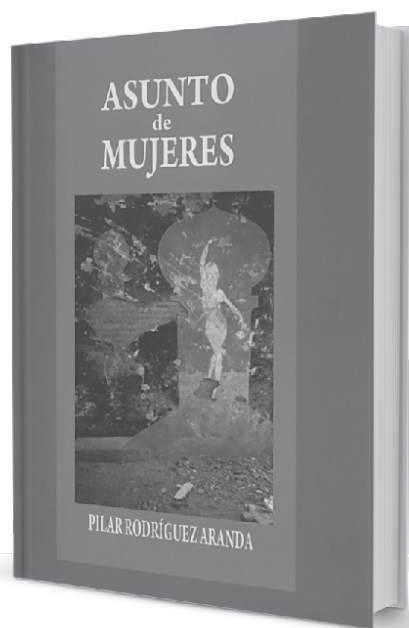
**Asunto de mujeres**

(Story of Women)

*Pilar Rodríguez Aranda*

Editorial Cascada de palabras-Cartera  
Mexico City, 2012, 81 pp.

In “What is a Poet?” renowned Chicano poet Francisco X. Alarcón writes that a poet is a voiceless voice that is at once joy and rage. This would certainly apply to this collection of poems by Mexican poet, video-poet, and literary translator Pilar Rodríguez Aranda.<sup>1</sup>



With several grants and awards under her arm, she has published extensively in magazines and anthologies. *Asunto de mujeres* (Story of Women)<sup>2</sup> is her first published volume of poetry. *Poemas de Isla* (*Isla Poems*) appeared in CD form a couple of years ago. Born in the state of Morelos, now settled in Mexico City as a *chilanga* (that is, a proud Mexico City dweller), her life was shaped during 13 years in the U.S., when she became a great admirer of the literary strength of Chicana/o and Latina/o writing and poetry that have greatly influenced her creative work.

Although she has published both in English and Spanish, this volume in particular is intended mainly for Spanish-speaking readers. And I would venture to say that as such it is a culturally revealing poetic window.

The title *Asunto de mujeres* suggests from the outset an intimate approach that addresses and includes women in the plural. The poetic language of the 41 poems in this volume is textured from what is clearly a woman's perspective, informed by her own experience and sensibility. The scope is intentionally broadened at times to suggest a metonymical voice speaking for and to many women. At others the specificity of the experience of other women, of their herstories, gathers metonymical resonances. The ideal reader, however, is determined by sensibility rather than gender.

The volume's four sections are titled "Hay amores" (There Are Loves), "Historia de ellas" (Herstories), "Asunto de mujeres" (Story of Women) and "Amor en casa" (Love at Home).

Whatever the themes and forms chosen, Rodríguez Aranda's poetry is nevertheless consistently simple and to the point, fluid and unpretentious, earthy and airy, strong yet poignant and vulnerable.

These poems wear well like grit stuck to walking shoes. We could also say they flower like buds in an open palm.

The dreams and hopes of a charmed life, of love and sharing, are shaped unexpectedly at times, mostly framed by day-in, day-out situations. The poetic voice remains on the whole dispassionate in a contained, healthy way, at times revealing the rough edges of sadness or fear. At other times a gentle gravity prevails and the reader encounters, too, moments of humorous zest.

The common comings and goings of love and loving undergo metamorphic stages as they shrink and spread, gaze into myriad mirrors without cringing. It is as if the poetic voice took delight in tracing with accuracy the fine lines of cracks in broken dreams. Evoking, as if in slow motion, their fall into fragments, like an earthen pot smashing on a tile floor. The contours of each piece outlined and acknowledged for what it was, for what it now is.

Bygones are bygones. Yet it becomes vital to document them. And at every turn of the page, time is revealed as an ally.

Rodríguez Aranda's style is fresh, unpretentious, and she consciously crosses easily from a loftier poetic mode to matter-of-fact reality: "La bruma se despeja/El smog se levanta" (p. 63) (The mists dispel/The smog rises). Some of the poems that revel in the erotic are set in the corners of daily life without becoming metaphorically overloaded or overly abstract, thereby remaining grounded.

The diversity of forms she resorts mirror a variety of perspectives that find a voice of their own. Among the several poetic strategies used is the contiguity of meanings that play off each other, that also function as interesting alliterative moments, such as "intimidado por la intimidación" (intimidated by intimacy) (p. 24) or "se atraganta sin garganta" (chokes without a throat) (p.27). Some effective word play is also featured, such as: "Ay amores / de pan y de nueces / Ay amores / de hambre y de sal" that juggle with the noun *¡ay!* (denoting pain or lamentation) and the verb "*hay*" (there are). These verses might be translated as "Oh, these / There are loves / of bread and nuts / Oh these / There are loves of hunger and salt".

One of Rodríguez Aranda's concerns is to find ways in which art and literature can become tools to face and disable violence, to cultivate peace consciousness. For many years

now she has been involved in individual and collective arts projects, such as *A Prayer for Juárez*, *Contra la violencia, el Arte* (Against Violence, Art), 100 Thousand Poets for Change, becoming what is known as an “artist.”

*Asunto de mujeres* explores the elusive and painful nature of violence against women: individually, collectively, anonymously, in intimacy. She does so with subtle and singular depth, with an informed perspective. The reader may well be left with a fine cactus spine under the skin: a barely perceptible yet persistent presence.

The poem simply titled “Ana Mendieta” is a lyrical rendering of one more herstory in the files of oblivion that is quietly evocative:

Sobre el pavimento neoyorkino	On the New York pavement
Ha quedado	now lies
Imperceptible	imperceptible
Su silueta	her silhouette

The reader is offered a footnote that informs us Ana Mendieta was a “Cuban-born visual artist who died at the age of 36 when she mysteriously fell from a tall building in New York” (pp. 35-36).

Several poems lay bare the finest fibers of what is all-too-simply termed “violence” in its multiple and insidious manifestations. They also often walk the tightrope between objectivity and the depths of pain and frustration.

“Una mujer muere” (A Woman Dies) shifts smoothly from the evocation of a single act of terrorist-attributed violence to media and public everyday indifference that results in amnesia. It thereby face-lifts the tragic irony of women as collateral damage.

Una mujer muere	A woman dies
Una bomba dirigida a su hijo	A bomb directed toward her son
le explota en la cara	explodes in her face
La culpa del sacrificio	The guilt of the sacrifice
es combustible para la prensa	is fuel for the press
es pobre excusa terrorista	is a poor terrorist excuse
es imagen pavorosa	is a horrific image
que olvidamos	that we forget
gracias al siguiente comercial	thanks to the next TV ad

In this poem Rodríguez Aranda poignantly involves and includes the reader through the use of the plural: “olvidamos” (we forget). The responsibility comes home silently —with a

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bang disguised as whimper. Media, collective and individual amnesia is everyone’s irresponsibility.

Some of the poems address domestic verbal violence; others deal with a wide range of “asuntos de mujeres,” for instance the inner tearing women undergo while juggling myriad roles expected from them (mother, wife, lover, career person) while maintaining the thin thread of being true to themselves.

They also address the pain of loss, while others become odes to being a woman and to mothering. In this sense Rodríguez Aranda’s poems are also a fresh celebration of life and art in every form. In “Cien mujeres” (A Hundred Women), the concluding poem of the volume, a wonderful weaving of individual and collective birthing is evoked with great rhythmic intensity. The poem begins: “Woman of dark complexión/a hundred women thrust behind you/A hundred waves of heat celebrate/the bubbling of what is birthed/from your volcanic crater” (“Mujer de rostro oscuro/cien mujeres empujan detrás tuyo/Cien olas de calor brindan/por el hervor del nacer/desde ese cráter tuyo”). Exuberant in its evocation of maternity as a major creative act, the poem continues, “Beyond pain/beyond fear/push/push/...A hundred women embrace you in silence” (“Más allá del dolor/más allá del miedo/empuja/empuja/...Cien mujeres te abrazan en silencio”) (pp. 79-81).

There is no doubt that *Asunto de mujeres* brings forth the voiceless voice that is at once joy and rage that Alarcón identifies with poetic essence. ■■■

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Pilar Rodríguez Aranda’s writing blogs are <http://PilarPoeta.blogspot.mx>, <http://poemasdella-anarca.blogspot.mx/>, and <http://poemsheis.blogspot.mx/>. Her website is <http://anarcafilms.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> Borrowed from Claude Chabrol’s 1988 movie *Une affaire de femmes*, translated as *Story of Women*.