

and highly Stalinist Czechoslovak model from the perspective of his commitment to the Trotskyist principle of the permanent revolution, which is, in turn, in conflict with Castro's compromises with the reasons of state (i.e., his Soviet dependence) that are maintained to have led to their falling out. On the other hand, in the person of his pro-Franco disguise, Che replicates for himself the mockery of the socialist model that he hears from rebellious locals with whom he comes in contact. The details are not so important here; what is important is how all this provides Posse with the opportunity to narrativize Che's self-reflections, doubts, and anxieties at a crucial transitional period in his life as a guerrilla fighter, with all the irony inherent in the fact that he cannot know that in less than a year he will have died in Bolivia and the all-embracing romantic phases of the midcentury Latin American revolutionary movement will have begun irremediably to decay, to have been definitively destroyed by the great power of neofascism within a decade.

Like Eva Perón (but unlike Juan Domingo Perón, who is now of no more than historical interest), Che continues to play a role in the Argentine and Latin American imagination, although basically for reasons far different than those of Evita in the 1950s and the 1970s and of Che in the 1960s and 1970s. If Evita is now of interest—undoubtedly *malgré elle*—to some versions of feminism, Che embodies the contradiction of sustaining any meaningful version of socialism at all in the context of precarious but nevertheless enthusiastically endorsed neoliberalism in Argentina in this decade. I cannot claim that Posse has any brilliant insights to offer (although I was encouraged by the statement that Argentina's jumble of ethnicities would surely bring delirium upon Dr. Mengele). Still, *Los cuadernos de Praga* is an interesting addition to the cultural production about Che.

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Clara Usón. *Noches de San Juan*. Barcelona. Lumen. 1998. 230 pages. ISBN 84-264-4946-8.

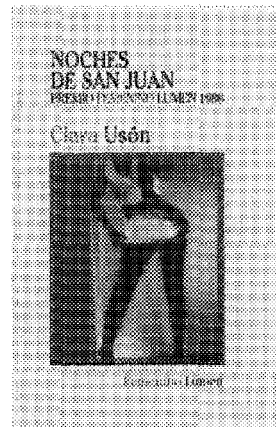
In 1998 Clara Usón's novel *Noches de San Juan* received the Femenino Prize awarded by the Lumen publishing house. The events recounted take place during the San Juan festivities in the city of Ciuradella, on the Spanish island of Menorca. Even though the description of these events provides the text with a folkloric flavor, the plot deals with the lives of a few marginal characters belonging to the lower ranks of this hierarchical society. In her attempt to portray this world in a proper manner, the author uses a style that could be characterized as "dirty realism," in order to reflect the slang and expressions typical of these people.

The story is told primarily from the perspective of Juani, a young and uneducated street merchant who dreams of overcoming her present reality of misery and subjugation by her brother. In search of that dream, and in her aim to achieve independence and love, she begins to steal and to exchange sexual favors for money. She then uses this money to wander day and night around the city, giving her the opportunity to meet new people. The majority of the characters in the novel engage in sexual

relations not only as a means of achieving pleasure, but also as their only method of financial gain, lying if necessary to achieve these material desires. As the novel progresses, Juani creates a world of fantasies which ultimately becomes her only reality. Like a naïve Cinderella who longs to live out her fantasy, she is only able to achieve self-esteem and to feel the appreciation and the love of others, especially of men, by firmly believing in the reality of her world of illusions. At the end of the novel, her frustrated search for self-liberation leads her to innocently provoke her brother's death, in an end typical of the most sentimental melodrama.

Usón's novel encompasses an extremely pessimistic attitude toward the possibility of the lower or marginalized classes' improving their living conditions, of breaking traditional power structures, and of overcoming gender differences. The author presents in these pages a Spain that is quite traditional, a country where power and gender hierarchies continue to determine the lives of its people. Unfortunately, there are some weaknesses that leave the work short of being entirely well-rounded. Even though Usón reflects upon some important social and gender-related issues, their presentation in the plot and their final denouement are unconvincing. In addition, Juani's idealistic and naïve view of the world is neither credible nor well developed through the text. Finally, the few characters portrayed in the novel, especially the homosexuals and transvestites, tend to be presented so stereotypically as to lack any psychological depth whatsoever.

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Verse

Carmen Bouillosa. *La Delirios*. Mexico City. Fondo de Cultura Económica. 1998. 86 pages. ISBN 968-16-5401-3.

The prefatory remarks to Carmen Bouillosa's small book of poetry explain its unusual title: "El delirio, tiránico e inflexible, somete a una voz; ella es *La Delirios*,

implacable vigilante de la conducta demencial del Mundo que ha extraviado, junto con el poder de sus dioses, su cordura. El origen de la vida se convierte en otro. El delirio ha renovado el origen mítico de la mujer y del hombre. ¿Qué puede esperarse? Ahora será diferente todo comportamiento." Indeed, the visions the author evokes in the pages that follow are of unconventional worlds wrought with mythic elements where Olympian figures often endure an ironic and poetic justice.

Boullosa's earlier novel *Duerme* (1994) prefigures much of the tone and vision of this powerful work and reprises such timely notions as the frailty of identities of gender, nationality, race, and more, delivered with deftly penned touches of magical realism. Both books prominently feature a sexually ambiguous protagonist who wryly, incisively, and intelligently pieces together much of the chaotic puzzle that confronts her.

The five sections of *La Delirios*—"Jardín Eliseo," "Niebla," "Sangre," "Los delirios," and "Europa: Puerto sin mar"—explore various forms of transformation and creation of identity ranging from the fates of the divine eternal to the construction of the personal present. "Jardín Eliseo," for instance, is a single, long, meandering tour de force wherein gods from all lands and ages pass in exhaustive review. Shed of their former grandeur, they are mere reflections of what power they once possessed to work good and evil. The embodiments of T. S. Eliot's "heap of broken images," they are the centuries of castoff myths that no longer define cosmologies, but on which we look with wistful recollection.

The following two poems, while still well wrapped in the discourse of myth and metaphor, introduce explorations of a more personal awareness and identity. The first poem suggests that the light of reason, that troublesome fruit of knowledge, has a transformative effect on that which is not the intellect. The second suggests that, although humans require other humans to thrive, the contact of person with person implies change and the death of the former self.

The last poem, "Europa: Puerto sin mar," is a tightly woven series of shorter poems that view Europe as a

metaphor, a place where people, things, and ideas lie in containers dockside, awaiting a problematic distribution. As all ports, this one has a dangerous and perverse attractiveness that the previous two poems explore as well. And as suggested more obliquely in other poems, the voice here states directly: "Este lugar puede significar mi muerte." The death will come by assimilation, by the continued European conquest of the body, heart, and mind of the Americas. It is reminiscent of the plaintive stroll past fallen icons in the first poem, but it contemporizes the dilemma.

La Delirios is a perceptive review of what it means to come of age, in this age. It is written with powerful mythic metaphors that one might read equally as a personal as well as a universal quest.

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Reina María Rodríguez. *La foto del invernadero*. Havana/Bogotá. Casa de Las Américas / Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Colombia. 1998. 92 pages. ISBN 959-04-0066-3.

Winner of the 1998 Premio Casa de las Américas for poetry, *La foto del invernadero* by Reina María Rodríguez (Cuba, 1952) is a collection consisting of brief poems, with the exception of six texts in lyric prose. All of the texts are fairly tightly organized around a common situation. Each poem presents the sometimes far-ranging musings elicited from a central "I" by the contemplation of one particular preserved image out of the past. In a number of cases, the image has been recorded photographically, while in others it has been registered in the memory of the speaking subject and has just been brought back to the surface of consciousness. The titles of some of the texts name the portrait subject or landscape whose image is being examined and commented upon. Other titles avoid direct reference to the object of contemplation, which only becomes identifiable as one reads the text centered upon it.

The above-described arrangement allows the speaker in these texts to travel both eastward geographically and backward in time. Several of the images appear to be aging photographs that tourists to the Mediterranean basin have taken of Greco-Roman and Near and Middle Eastern antiquities. The "I" who ruminates in these poems is a late-twentieth-century individual with an ironic eye for the romantic allure with which earlier travelers invested the South of Europe and the Orient. However, at the same time this up-to-date speaker demonstrates some empathy with those excitable tourists. For example, the poem "olympias" begins: "la flota griega sigue / la huella de Simbad—el árabe legendario."

The jacket art by the Cuban artist René Portocarrero is worth mentioning. His mixed-media graphics, beautiful in themselves, succeed in providing readers with an accurate clue to the poems' fusion of nostalgia with ironic awareness and convey the fascination of discovering a portrait photograph from an earlier era.

La foto del invernadero is carefully worked around the central concept of a leisurely survey of images. This framework allows for a consideration of memory and its unre-

