UCLA
Mester

Title
SHERNO, SYLVIA. Weaving thc world: The Pociry of Gloria Fuertes . University, Mississippi: Romance Monographs, 2001. 264 pp.

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/060847pw

Journal
Mester, 31(1)

Author
Arsova, Jasmina

Publication Date
2003

DOI
10.5070/M3311014580

Copyright Information
Copyright 2003 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at https://escholarship.org/terms

Peer reviewed

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

SHERNO, SYLVIA. *Weaving the world: The Poetry of Gloria Fuertes.* University, Mississippi: Romance Monographs, 2001. 264 pp.

[. . .]en el centro de un mar
que no me entiende,
rodeada de nada,
-sola sólo.
OI, 21

An ignored island is a metaphor true to the original, a daring poet who challenges the reader on numerous levels. Consequently, it requires a dynamic, constantly evolving mind to attempt a completion of a mosaic that will reflect the energetic, lyrical breaths of such a complex and unique artist. Thus, a critic interested in a profound analysis of the work of this poet of post-war Spain faces an uneasy task, yet an extremely rewarding one. Sylvia Sherno's contribution to such an effort echoes the treasures of the artist's intriguing personae and remains true to what it invites the reader to experience.

The introduction to the book locates the poet thematically to her generation of post-war social poets, Celaya and Otero. Yet, based on her very personal, idiosyncratic style, it places her in proximity to a younger group, which includes Rodríguez, González, Brines, Gil de Biedma and Valente. Sherno identifies the two central currents that connect Fuertes's work to the poetry of those mentioned above. First, these poets focus on personal subjects and themes that underscore anecdotal events of everyday reality, and second, the meta-poetic discourse, which stretches the limits of the traditional use of language in the creative process, is a common practice for this group of poets. Yet what Sherno maintains as one of her focal points in this book is Gloria Fuertes's indisputable idiosyncrasy, which does not allow for any comfortable classifications. Therefore, what the book promises to explore in depth is "the various ways Fuertes's work exemplifies an aesthetic of marginality "(5).

How Sherno decides to structure the book reflects the poet's embrace of myriad visions in contrast to any singular perspective typical of linear systems. Accordingly, the book follows the studies of critics Jose Luis Cano, Brenda Logan Capuccio and Martha La Follete as a platform from which to unfold its tapestry of multiple perspectives

on the poet's work. However, Sherno also highlights the cohesive element found in themes and preoccupations of Fuertes's poetry, both socially and intimately, a deeply humanistic approach. What Sherno aspires to is "unity-within-variety" by choosing her rhetoric such as "interweave, texture, thread" to strengthen the image suggested by the very title of the book (11). Furthermore, she justifies this focus by the poet's explicit interest in the creative process of a seamstress and a weaver, occupations which are applied directly to her poetry. As Sherno notices, Fuertes's words are destined for those ex-centric souls who much like the poet are "missing the eye of the needle, as they concentrate on threading through love" (12). What follows, then, is truly a web of possible interpretations of this poet's extraordinary work.

The first part of the book examines autobiography as a viable tool for poetry analysis, as well as the role of genre, gender and identity in Gloria Fuertes's work. Colloquialisms, vulgarisms and clichés present in her verses don't suggest facts but rather invite more ambiguities, enigmas and contradictions. Fuertes's autobiographical proclamations are based on an illusive ground of truth and illusion that poses a crucial question: To what extent does Fuertes represent her authentic self in her work? Accordingly, she exemplifies Derrida's "flood-gate of 'genre'" and defenerscence— elucidation and occlusion at the same time. Text never supercedes life; self can never be rendered by the act of writing. While Fuertes's poetry does not offer a paradigm for female autobiographers to follow, it highlights the possibility of discovering and re-inventing self by force of creative authority. "Embodying a Woman's Poetics" argues that through poetry Fuertes gives birth to herself, simultaneously as a woman and text. Self-abnegation, denial, silence and lack, aloneness and desire (all present in her verses), at once "give body to a woman's voice and make of a woman's body a ripe and fluid source of creativity" (48). A historical perspective on misogynistic duality, dichotomy as it relates to the body and the mind, where the mind is male property solely (49), helps accentuate Fuertes's need to be "fuera de serie," a woman writer who joins physical and creative impulses. "The Poetics of Solitude" looks at this notion through the prism of the word abandon, defined by Lawrence Lipking to mean submission to the will of others and freedom from the power imposed by another. Consequently, Gloria Fuertes's thematic focus on loneliness is an expression of her actual female abandonment that in turn is the agency that formulates the individuality of her poetry. She uses her non-conformist attitude towards the

authority of male discourse, as a rich source of artistic expression, challenging the conventional canon on many levels. Her entire poetry becomes an exercise of inner awareness and protest. It also persists with unexpected lines and images to challenge the reader's indifference and dispel any preconceived notions of the tranquil nature of poetry (82). Such an attitude leads us to the segment on "Poetry (Anti) poetry" where Fuertes's employment of ordinary language is discussed. The poet raises the value of mundane experience to a higher level, above the metaphysical, esoteric one traditionally characteristic of poetry. While Fuertes tries to marry reality of everyday diction to poetry, she supports two distinct concepts of poetry: poetry imitates the real world and that it is itself a parallel order of reality (88). Thus, she advocates anti-poetry as the counterpart to the historically preferred hegemony of classic poetic norms, ones she consistently challenges. The reader who does not enter her poetry with a "beginner's mind", completely void of preconceived notions and expectations of poetic possibilities and characteristics is greatly defied.

The second part of the book commences by examining "Nature, Things, Self, and Poetry". Two models by Annis Pratt and Carol Christ are explored. The first one analyzes the artist's search for a lost "green world", a matriarchy, and the second one is a paradigm for female identity quest. An eco-critical approach to Fuertes's poetry is advocated, as relevant aspects are identified in the verses that offer a glance into the poet's intimate relationship with nature, in harmony with all its cycles. Her poetic world is found to be abundant in spaces that cross all possible societal boundaries and to emanate a spirit of generosity and recognition of all dualities that exist within each individual. Such outlook, argues Sherno, praises organic interrelatedness, the goal of deep ecology (142), and at the same time embraces the poet's full womanly integrity. "'Una mística terrenal': God, Spirituality, and Natural Transformation" explores the theme of God as an opening that leads to more clarity about the poet's unusual perceptions of the world. Fuertes represents nature as the embodiment of a deity that is harmoniously tuned into the process of its constantly evolving and immanent qualities. As a result, she chooses language to be the medium of transformation that reflects the divine. Language invites a reevaluation of all the hierarchies of belief, meaning, and worth, both linguistically/artistically and as related to the biblical parables. Her deity is not a set of absolute, immovable truths and values, rather an ambiguous, changeable and provisional entity (163). "Playing with

fire" elaborates on the discourse of otherness in Fuertes's writings as a "poetic strategy" that "foregrounds (her) political, social, and imaginative fibers" (172). The extent to which the poet plays consciously and purposely with her readers is analyzed by looking at the various theories on play in literature, as outlined by Johan Huizinga, Roger Caillois, Emile Benveniste, Jacques Ehrmann and Jacques Derrida, complemented by the various nonsense techniques studied by Susan Stewart. The central argument the author debates here is that Fuertes utilizes all the particular linguistic strategies as powerful tools of critiquing the socio-political truths and values (184) surrounding her, while simultaneously broadening the scope of expectations regarding poetry. This ties into the discussion on paranomasia, as a word play that keeps the language dynamic, evolving and resistant to closure (165), implying the absolute flexibility of language, constantly inventing and reinventing itself. Fuertes significantly stretches our notions of reality and illusions, and the extent to which our words are able to create it or recreate it (190). Consequently, Fuertes's vision of poetry is entirely circular.

The last segment of the book, "Carnival: Death and Renewal, Celebration and Subversion" focuses on the extent to which Bakhtin's notion of carnival (as a form related to the folkloric and the humorous in life's rituals, as well as to parody and the grotesque in literature) is reflected in Fuertes's art. The debate maintains that Fuertes's preference for the vulgar and the colloquial, over highly stylized linguistic idioms, is in concordance with the element of the grotesque, which is crucial to the spirit of carnival. Carnival, then, becomes an important place where this woman poet is able to defy the traditionally male dominated canon of literature and as such convert it into her personal trademark. The frequent techniques of negation and inversion, employed by the poet, represent the carnivalesque displacement and destruction of hierarchies (200). This belief underscores Fuertes's use of poetry as a circus arena (again, specific to carnivals) where she is free to exercise her rebellious convictions against the meaningless and ridiculous norms of the society around her. Accordingly, the concluding remarks of the book elucidate that the distinctive voice of Gloria Fuertes proves to be an intimate counteraction to the patriarchies surrounding her. Her "most unfeminine disregard for poetic decorum" (223), and challenges to the linguistic tradition situate her work "al borde" of the mainstream in all the senses. As a result, this is the main source of her particular aesthetic of "ex-centricity" and marginality. Sherno interrelates the weaving of

Fuertes's poetry to the actual female craft as a metaphor for her particular way of communication with the world that in the poet's case promotes her "self-affirmation and power." The ending argument integrates all the previously debated points by persisting that Gloria Fuertes's artistry truly "redefines the center" of the poetic tapestry she creates.

The book is consistent with what it proposes to complicate and resolve as outlined in its introduction. Relevant academic references are used to elucidate author's arguments, along with generous excerpts of Fuertes's poems to illustrate the same. The explicit feminist reading of the poet's work is grounded in significant theories that deal with women's poetics in general along with linguistic aspects that apply to it. This book identifies the main currents present in Fuertes's sea of poetry, backed up by detailed examination of selected, predominantly non-linguistic elements. While it does not explore the linguistic element of Fuertes's uniqueness to its fullest, it identifies some of the crucial markers pertinent to the subject. Overall, it is a collection of various, important, defining characteristics of the artist and her creation, thus imposing itself as a sequence of openings that lead one to a holistic approach to Fuertes's poetics. Hence, in the spirit of Sherno's lexicon, this book weaves novel threads that integrate into the embroidery of Fuertes's tapestry (poetry), which regretfully remains academically under-appreciated in resonance with its merits. Charged with original associations ranging from traditional to postmodernist studies, it is an auspicious invitation to a possible future scholar of this unjustly and frequently overlooked woman poet's work. *Weaving the World: The Poetry of Gloria Fuertes* is a wealthy, multifaceted interpretation of Gloria Fuertes's art, a poignant and sympathetic study that is alive and interactive. It proves itself to be exactly what it aspires to metaphorically, a weaving process, meaning profoundly creative analysis that opens new doors without burning any of the bridges that link the already explored options with the ones still awaiting attention. Where it does not pretend to hold the key answers, it poses the key questions one should entertain when contemplating the verses of Gloria Fuertes.

Jasmina Arsova
University of California, Los Angeles