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balbuceos. Palabra fragmentaria, hecha jirones, que se cuela por las desgarraduras del hombre solo, del hombre valiente, que, ante la inmensidad del Ser, se enfrenta desarmado en medio del páramo de su soledad.

En *Sonata de violoncello y lilas*, su segundo libro, el autor mantiene el mismo tono, las mismas indagaciones y temores que presentaba en su libro anterior. Hasta el dolor se mantiene vigente, pero allí donde en *Brasa blanca* decía "heridas" o "llagas", aludiendo a la posible transitoriedad de esas marcas, en *Sonata* dice "tajos", tajos que se han hecho parte del alma del poeta: "como resonando desde un violoncello/pero no de cuerdas,/de tajos" (51). Tajos que ayudan a modelar sus perfiles interiores como un orfebre que cincela una estatua: "y seré la noria de mi propia estatua/hasta cincelarla polvo,/hasta esposar el viento" (19). Y en este hacerse nuevamente, el poeta —ese "cordero herido" (23)— se nace a sí mismo, deviene un hombre nuevo, hecho de dolor y miedo, construido desde sus profundidades internas, desde ese pozo oscuro: "muñeca sin ojos tirada/sobre adoquines/caen hacia dentro/sus ojos cavados/hacia nacerse,/donde las lluvias nacen" (17).

Poesía de sugerencias que recuerda la hondura y sencillez de los haikus japoneses y la paradojal sabiduría de los koan-zen, pero que en definitiva es la expresión de la espiritualidad de un cristiano que concibe a la palabra como elemento originario del hombre.

—Silvia Pellarolo
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Gina Valdés. *Comiendo lumbre*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Maize Press, 1986. 62 pages.

The fires that Gina Valdés refers to in the title of this collection of bilingual verses both consume her and are consumed by her. She is "fired" by love and anger, by joy and denunciation, by the intimacy of erotic passion, and by a passion for human dignity. She is torn by the divisions between the Mexican and Anglo cultures, and by her twin allegiances to the Spanish and English languages. Her poetic vision centers on these dualities and is charged by them; alternatively, she suffers the alienation they provoke. The author of *Puentes y fronteras: coplas chicanas* (1982) is ever mindful of the barriers between people; it is poetry itself, an artful blend of magic and quotidian reality, that ultimately affords her the possibility of connection.

Like that of other Chicana writers, Valdés's work inevitably deals with the question of identity, which she views as shaped by the inseparable experiences of the Chicana, the woman, and the artist. As a child, she

"played hopscotch at the . . . border línea abstract barrier/between [her] two concrete worlds" (16). The vying tastes of "naranjes/con chile" succinctly capture her reality as a Chicana (9). In "Where you from?," the opening poem of *Comiendo lumbre*, she zigzags dizzingly between "aquí" and "allá," highlighting the confusion of a life spent crossing frontiers, not all of them geographical (9). The affronts to their dignity suffered by both of her parents, newly arrived in California, become emblematic of those endured by so many other "nómadas buscando/un lugar donde alojarse" (12). Indeed, Valdés's awareness of social and political conditions and causes invariably weaves her individual experiences into the larger fabric of the collective experience.

As a woman, Valdés delights in confronting the limitations of stereotypes and accepted conventions. She recalls gleefully how the appearance of her tall, blonde mother derailed the preconceived notions of docile Mexican womanhood held by visiting teachers and social workers. In a less benign vein, she remembers the fear and suspicion that met her sister, dressed like a boy and adamant in her refusal to conform to the image of "the acceptable feminine woman":

> Ese era el mundo que nos esperaba. Yo
> la aceptable mujer femenina, la que
> promete conformidad. Tú, a desarrollar
> tus diferencias a escondidas, o abiertamente
> y rechazada.. (14)

Gina Valdés envisions herself as a part of the richly-textured tapestry of women's history. In the poem that concludes the collection,"Las manos," she employs the image of women's hands as a synecdoche representing the whole of women's history. "Estas manos, tan inmensas, tan pequeñas,/dos chuparrosas,.../con un clavo atravesado de acero americano," women's hands convey the poet's loving pride in her female heritage. These hands pray and demand, cook food and concoct dreams, and perform all the habitual acts routinely dismissed as "women's work." Women's hands, Valdés tells us, sing, dance, and make music; they teach, they heal, and especially "poco a poco desentierran nuestra historia" (61).

The transcendent mission that Gina Valdés sets for herself and for her poetry is to construct bridges across alienating human barriers. No idle luxury, poetry is rather a matter of urgency: "Quiero irme/acercando a otros fuegos. Necesito escribir . . ." (45). She uses her art as a way of denouncing institutionalized thought and language, of warning against the risks in blindly accepting official pronouncements. She includes among her targets the medical establishment, purveyors of dubious cures and remedies, and the ivory tower, where artistic expression has somehow been perverted into "creative oppression" (57). Somewhat more macabre is her opposition to

the systematic use of insecticides, the consumption of which puts us all in danger of becoming "totally radiant being[s]" (55). "Peace Corps" is the title of another poem in which Valdés decries the hypocrisy contained in official doublespeak: "A Chicano activist is called a troublemaker/a racist principal, a competent administrator" (49). Language itself constitutes another target for Valdés: "Usted (Vuestra merced)" protests against social hierarchies and their correlative antiquated linguistic structures (55).

Gina Valdés's idealism is inspired by those revolutionaries who *live* their poetry, for whom poetry and revolution are in fact intimately intertwined. In the face of human suffering, any lesser poetic commitment is a luxury she can ill afford, and so she aspires, like her fellow poets, to "love the revolution/of the word and give the word to/the revolution" (59). In more acerbic moments, she knows that as "a poet hustling hot verbs," she is only a little more fortunate than other "rucas of the night . . ./in this/big cathouse U S A, que a todos nos USA" (58).

Despite the cynical tone of such sentiments—and despite the place names, humble objects, and slang that ground these verses in everyday reality—much of Valdés's poetry possesses a kind of spiritual, even magical, quality. Some of her poems retrieve images and scenes already present in her novel, *There are no madmen here* (1981), suggesting that Valdés is conscious of her work both as an organic whole and as a work-in-progress. Still in *Comiendo lumbre* she has clearly honed her gifts for powerfully evocative imagery, particularly in the title poem and in such haiku-like verses as "Koh." The repeated presence of circular images (a child's ball, the sun, the moon), discloses a desire for wholeness and unity, a bridge across the frontiers. Indeed, as the title *Comiendo lumbre* suggests, swallowing, devouring, absorbing within herself are for the poet ways to reconcile alienating opposites. This, for example, is the way she describes the curative powers of the moon:

> Dadora de sonrisas,
> círculo de delicia,
> ...
> mamá de la vida, hostia
> terrestre, inspiración
> de costureras y poetas,
> quiero comerte a besos. (30)

The cover illustration, also executed by Gina Valdés, represents a serpent, symbol of sun and moon, male and female, light and darkness. The serpent is coiled into a crescent shape, its tail turned back on itself, its mouth spouting (absorbing?) fire...

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