

Writers of Tierra Adentro Publishers Two Mexican Women Novelists of the 1990s¹

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Surviving several administrations, budget cuts, innumerable crises of the publishing industry, a dearth of readers, disastrous distribution and the other evils that plague the books published by cultural institutions, the Fondo Editorial Tierra Adentro (Inland Publishing Fund) had its tenth anniversary in 2000. The fund is part of an editorial program of the same name whose aim is to disseminate the work of young writers and artists as well as the most important cultural and artis-

tic products and activities in different regions of Mexico. The program's other projects are a bi-monthly magazine of the same name,² a weekly radio show and the co-organization of the Edmundo Valadés Contest to Support Independent Magazines and the Elías Nandino National Young People's Poetry Prize.

The publishing house was created in 1990 as an addition to the dissemination that the magazine had been doing up until then, when it began its second period. It publishes anthologies by genre and individually and collectively writ-

ten books to make new voices known and stimulate literary creation. The books have also been vehicles for disseminating the work of young visual artists, which appears on their covers, giving them a defined, distinctive image. In addition to having beautiful cover designs, they are carefully edited.

The publishing house's catalogue boasts more than 200 titles in different genres: poetry, short stories, novels, plays and essays.

Poetry is the collection's most favored genre for a very simple reason: almost no publishing house that survives based

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only on its sales will risk publishing books of poetry today, so competition among poets, both men and women, is very stiff.³ Tierra Adentro could dedicate itself exclusively to poetry given the number of manuscripts received.

Second comes narrative: more short-story writers than novelists are printed because it is easier to get a manuscript of a novel accepted at a commercial house. In addition, younger authors produce more collections of short stories than novels.

Tierra Adentro tries not to publish miscellaneous collections of essays because that could lead to its books being groups of articles published previously elsewhere. Its view is that monographic essays are more interesting for the reader and have a more lasting effect. The origin of the author studied is not important: there are essays about Ermilo Abreu Gómez, Malcolm Lowry, Efraín Huerta, Bruno Traven, Inés Arredondo and others. Several of these are prize-winning essays.

The playwrights are the smallest group for a logical reason: their work is produced to be performed and rarely to be published as a book.

Basically, the collection is made up of young men and women authors. The editors have made an effort to establish a balance between those from Mexico City and from the rest of the country. Many are fellowship recipients from national and state funds to promote young artists; the winners of regional prizes like the Juan Rulfo prize for a first novel, the San Luis Potosí short story prize or Tabasco's Enriqueta Ochoa de Torreón and Josefina Vicens prizes; or national prizes like the one for narrative given by the National Fine Arts Institute.

In the last five years, since Tierra Adentro has been a sponsor of the Elías

Nandino Poetry Prize, in addition to its consisting of a sum of money, it guarantees publication of the book, which is printed in less than a month so it can be awarded together with the prize money. This has created greater expectations and every time the prize is to be given, about 200 collections of poetry compete for it.⁴

Former Tierra Adentro editor Juan Domingo Argüelles says that in recent years the number of manuscripts received from women has increased. He thinks that this is linked to the fad of women's literature which he says, regardless of theme and quality, has been a springboard for young women writers to make their work known. I do not completely agree with him. I think that ascribing greater participation of women to a fad and not to a broadening out of possibilities is, even if involuntarily, to a certain point pejorative.

Let's look at the figures. In all, Tierra Adentro has published 205 volumes:

- in 1990, it published six books, none by a woman;
- in 1991, there were 20 books, six by women (two books of poetry,

two of short stories and two of essays);

- in 1992, of 26 books, only three were by women (two books of poetry, one of essays);
- in 1993, of 33 books, seven were by women (six of poetry, one of short stories);
- in 1994, of 16 books, only two were by women writers (both of short stories), although an anthology of children's literature was also published, compiled by Silvia Molina;
- in 1995, the number of books dropped to seven, only one by a woman poet;
- in 1996, production increased to 22 books, five by women in different genres (two of poetry, one of essays, one of short stories and one of plays);
- in 1997, of the 24 books published, again five were by women writers (two books of poetry, three of short stories) and Thelma Nava edited a poetry anthology;
- in 1998, the number of volumes published went up to 30, of which



nine were by women (one of plays, one of short stories and six of poetry);

- in 1999, although the number of books published dropped to 19, eight were by women (three of short stories, two of poetry, two of plays and one novel).

Some of the books by women, says Argüelles, are among the best and most interesting that Tierra Adentro has ever published.

It is not a question of a fad, then, but of the authors' maturity, as can be seen when reviewing the titles. Of the many books of short stories, some are noticeably the product of a workshop; most of them are fresh, but the desire to surprise the reader subtracts from their effectiveness. Nevertheless, several are of high quality, like *Prefiero los funerales* (I Prefer Funerals) (no. 120, 1996) by Yucatan-born Carolina Luna. Humor is an outstanding characteristic of this book and in the long story, we encounter an homage to her fellow Yucatecan, Juan García Ponce. Other books include the collection by Elizabeth Vivero, *Con los ojos perdidos* (With a Lost Look) (no. 197, 1999), and Alejandra Camposeco, *El bilé y otras ensañaciones* (Lipstick and Other Fancies) (no. 198, 1999), undoubtedly two of the most interesting examples of the work of the youngest women writers in Mexico. Among the collections of poetry, one exceptional book is *La más mía*



(The Most Mine) (no. 173, 1998) by Cristina Rivera Garza, an intense narrative poem about the relations between mothers and daughters, illness and the impossibility of expressing love.

And in the whole series, two rarities: the only two novels by women writers. In this issue of *Voices of Mexico*, we offer a fragment of each of them.

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Una manera de morir (A Way of Dying) by Vizania Amezcua is like a symphony. Written in first person like an autobiography, like in any self-respecting postmodern game the protagonist has written a novel called *Una manera de morir* and on the cover is a reference to the mystery that the narrator tries to reveal: the statue of a young girl with a wrinkled neck and her head thrown back in pleasure, called *The Tongue*.

Covering 1951 to the end of the century, with a tone of nostalgia that invades the novel like the rain in the city where it is set, the text is a recounting of the memory of the protagonist that in every chapter moves back and forth through her past and present.

Antonia, the narrator, near death, remembers the details of her life in a grey city of the provinces, her vocation as a writer almost lost in the catalogue cards of a library, the details of her relationship with Vicente, the only man in her life, the only spiritual and physical love, the game in which they borrowed the names of the sculptor and sculptress J.W. Fiske and Eva Roy, the long and apparently fruitless wait.

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When you are a reader by vocation, you spend your life in search of that

desirable object that absorbs us in its rectangular black and white space that is a window to other spaces open and full of shades of color. This seems to have happened to Susana Pagano with Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*. Of course, even the least knowledgeable reader of Mexican literature could now ask, "And who did it not happen to?" But Pagano's case is special. In her, the reader's enthusiasm became an intertextual game so that, in turn, her readers could unwind it.

Y si yo fuera Susana San Juan... (And If I Were Susana San Juan...) is a feminine genealogy. In contrast with Susana San Juan, who lives with her father and grieves for her husband, physically —not spiritually— at the side of Pedro Páramo, Susana, the narrator, lives with her mother, who was abandoned by her father, and her mad grandmother. ■■■

NOTES

¹ A version of this article appeared for the first time in Ana Rosa Domenella, comp., *Territorio de leonas. Cartografía de narradoras mexicanas de los noventa* (Mexico City: UAM-Juan Pablos, 2000).

² The magazine includes literature, graphics, painting, photography and articles about music, dance, theater, architecture, regional history, culture and folk art. It was created in 1974 and its main objective is the projection of young creators throughout the country. It is now in its second period.

³ Interview with Juan Domingo Argüelles, chief editor of the magazine and the publishing house until 2001, 20 January 2000.

⁴ Tierra Adentro receives between 60 and 70 manuscripts a year, of which 30 are published, budget allowing. The manuscripts are first reviewed inside the program and then sent to panels of judges organized by genre.