

Georgina Herrera: A Genuine Cimarron

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She was born in 1936. This poet's literary work might be interpreted as a particular geographical place in which transparency, verses genuinely free of strident rhetoric, and a commitment to using her talent for touching a broad range of human emotions, come together.

It is easy to hear in her poetry echoes of the life experiences that have marked her during her long road through abysses and sea swells. But one can also appreciate in it a place where one can feel the gentle breathing of a rose and the chirping of birds framing a dawn about to peel off the last vestiges of night.

Georgina Herrera sings to pain and grateful memory without reaching the altar of vanity. She is content with being the bearer of an unwithering spontaneity that becomes perpetuated in the memory of those who read her books and understand the messages only she knows how to prepare, seasoning them with experience and a style free of elaborate language and other trappings that tend to reduce the accessibility of the poetic universe.

A recurring theme in her work reveals a commitment to her race regarding the avatars

of their current existence and a past that is also filled with stigmas, many of them even more cutting than the current ones.

She has the good fortune of being able to dig deep with tact, and not creating aesthetic dissonance. Above all, she does this with a real artistry that reveals her pride in descending from an indelibly African genealogical tree. It is as if she had a camera on her shoulder and a microphone in hand, in order to interrogate the history of the drama that was lived by millions of men and women who were torn from their lands, and trapped in the net of suffering that perdures under the guise of unmet demands and other forms of camouflage that become threadbare with each ensuing controversy.

Herrera joins the rank and file of those who refuse to shut themselves off in the safety of quiet cells. In Cuba, this is often taken for treason or political leanings that blur true freedom, in all its possible forms. This tranquil-faced woman, with her proverbial simplicity, prefers screaming over a submissive gesture, with her index finger pointing at the victimizer, and not wiping her brow or

crossing her heart in an act of resignation. However, she does this with the daintiness of a true lady who is not afraid to publicly expose her lifelong enmity with hate. Above all, she seeks to illuminate the dark zones that persist in the masked followers of the Ku-Klux-Klan, whose philosophy still sees blacks as an aberration of nature.

Georgine Herrera's journey down the road as a cimarron begins when she erupts on the intellectual scene, in the 1960s, and shows no signs of deviating from that path, or taking breaks from it. She feels comfortable doing this, free of trappings that might denaturalize her creativity or force her to compromise, a situation that takes on a ghostly aura and offers little possibility of once again being tangible and pure. Her poetry hates these zones, which are often frequented by colleagues, because they reside in the peripheries of ambiguity, as a place in which to survive the strong winds—sometimes hurricane-like—of a system that in its core abhors those who work in culture. Unless, of course, they raise their right fists to support a crime or are members of the silent minions whose number is growing both at the center and the margins of barbarism.

Far from adjusting, Georgine Herrera has preferred promoting rebelliousness, and she does so without having lost her ability to evoke scenes of beauty and sensuality that have not been ignored in the literature about love poetry in Cuba over last fifty years. Her poem "Sentencia" reveals as much:

*Nunca arderá a tu cabecera
un fuego más intenso
que estos dos ojos míos
al mirarte
en el intento de una manera nueva
para esa pequeña ira
legendaria*

*que es amor de siempre.
Nunca
verás creciendo sobre
la tierra que hice de tu piel
ese árbol
en que transformé mi cuerpo solo,
para tu amor.
Y nunca
ya más seré ese río
múltiple de mi boca
lugar donde tu sed desaparezca.*

[At your headboard never will there burn
a fire more intense
than my two eyes
when they look at you
in their attempt to find a new way
for that tiny, legendary
rage
that love always is.
Never
will you see growing on
the earth I made of your skin
that tree
in which I transformed my body
only for your love.
And never
will I once again be
my mouth's multiple river
where your thirst disappears].

"El tigre y yo dormimos juntos"[The Tiger and I Sleep Together] is another example of her lyric richness, for its unobjectionable polysemic value, and because it is once again based upon a clean and direct style whose message is not lost:

*El tigre tuvo un sueño,
se echa junto a mí, se duerme
como un regalo inusitado; tiendo
la mano y lo acaricio.*

*Dichosa es esta mano que se pierde
entre el dibujo de su piel
Me arrimo aún más.
El tigre es tibio y manso. Pego
Mi oído a su corazón
Apenas late.
¿Cómo puede ser tan pausado
El corazón del tigre?*

[The tiger had a dream,
its lies by me, falls asleep
like a precious gift; I reach out
my hand and stroke him.
Lucky is this hand that gets lost
in the patterns of his skin.
I get even closer.
The tiger is warm and gentle. I
press my ear to his heart
It hardly beats.
How can this tiger's heart
be so calm?]

In addition to her excellent work as a radio scriptwriter (she wrote more than 60), Georgina Herrera is noteworthy because she published eight poetry collections during this same period: *GH* (1960), *Gentes y cosas* (1974), *Granos de sol y luna* (1977), *Grande es el tiempo* (1989), *Gustadas sensaciones* (1997), *Gritos* (2005), *África* (2006) and *Gatos y Liebres* (2010). We must also remember her unpublished books: *Los hijos de Israel* and *Tiempo traído de los pelos*, the latter of which received an honorable mention by the UNE-AC, but was never published.

We also cannot forget the poet's incredible versatility, as she wrote the film-script she wrote for *Las raíces de mi corazón* (2001). It is the first time a film deals with the subject of the massacre of thousands of Independent Party of Color members, between May and July 1912. The short, feature film was directed by filmmaker Gloria Rolando.

It is also important to point out that she was part of the repressed *Grupo El Puente* literary and publishing group, which in the 1960s attempted to create a space for art and literature beyond the confines of officialdom. This caused her to be marginalized, as happened with almost all of the group's members. Yet, despite the obstacles, she was able to carry out some of her plans, but not without a high price—a series of abominable events supported by a socialist revolution that eventually culminated in the current totalitarian dictatorship.

Georgina Herrera did not opt for exile or silencing her woes. She persevered in her desire to defend her principled position—and she won. There she is, with perhaps one or numerous artistic-literary project waiting to be completed. Hopefully, it will be a book of poetry full of evocations of a life full of light and shadow. Her verses will once again be measured and transparent, be full of pain and glee, sun and dark clouds. In the end, it will be another interval of her life, newly revealed to us via a perspective free of grey pessimism.