

mexican(s)

american(s)

Making Love Violently

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**SIN PUERTAS VISIBLES:
AN ANTHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY
POETRY BY MEXICAN WOMEN**

Edited and translated by Jen Hofer

University of Pittsburgh Press
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256 pages; paper, \$22.50

In the 1990s, an anthology of Mexican women's poetry issued by Milkweed Editions got mixed reviews, and a study of significant female Mexican fiction writers came out of the University of Texas Press. Neither seems as striking as poet and translator Jen Hofer's assemblage of poetry from Mexico, which vividly captures some of the voices in the culture of women writers there.

A few years ago, Hofer put out calls in Mexico's dailies and lit journals, received responses from 500 authors, and chose eleven for this collection. The poets here come from locales as disparate as Guadalajara, Córdoba, Mexico City, and Monclova.

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Virtually all of these poems have at least one rich new poetic sound to offer English speakers. There are some clichés, too, but Hofer can produce highly exact translations, which in turn make for startling English. For example, Laura Solorzano's phrase "*sonido ambiental*" becomes "environmental sound" via Hofer, a fresh, unexpected phrase.

Cristina Rivera-Garza's anthemic "*Tercer Mundo*" revolves around a city described in vaguely familiar futuristic imagery, a place where both time and space are "not yet." Garza describes a shack "about to exist

and about not to exist"; while on the "other side of the far edge, the biggest city in the world lied." Though the poem's title hints that it might be more overtly political than it is, the language echoes the imagery in a pleasing way, and Garza's piece offers slashlike glimpses of life divided and informed by class hierarchies: "The dead crept through the *Terzo* with the somnolent little eyes of the resuscitated..."—

Those trained to dominate sank for the first
time into a fleeting weakness
strident potions fed the slow
unformed corners of their mouth
their corners spread open as they fall in
seven reelings disproportionate
reeling arms of helicopteric light....

Each author's work in this anthology is followed by a statement of poetics; most of these are lovely and absorbing extensions of the poets' works (and sometimes they're better than the poems themselves). Details the poets provide about their writing lives will pique the interest of US authors who also struggle to integrate poetry into a daily existence alongside "real-world" concerns. One poet states her writing practice is indebted to saints; she lights candles. Others describe ways in which they position themselves around the angles of language and usage (as one author states, "Words are a carnal vehicle"). Such authorial statements add a wonderful finish to this book.

Poet Delores Dorantes writes in her self-statement that "here [in Northern Mexico] people are accustomed to violence, to living with violence, to seeing it as a natural phenomenon. Here we even make love violently." The poems I found in this anthology offer a sensibility far away from the burdened, overwhelmed Self heard in much American writing. But if there is violence in Dorantes's and the book's other works, it's submerged; as Dorantes hints, though, it may inform the poetry broadly and atmospherically.

Dorantes also writes in her authorial statement, "I'm a common Mexican woman. But there is some-

thing more common still that links me not only to my country but also to Latin America: my calling. When you're a writer in Latin America, it's for no other reason than your need to answer your calling." Her poetry, with profound sounds and rhythms, moves along beautifully in Spanish:

*La tilde impar
glaseante
en la garganta*

The uneven tilde
glazing
in the throat

en su castillo ístmico

In its isthmian
ideal
castle

idónea

contra paredes de carne

against walls of
flesh
against throbs....

contra latidos...

Solorzano's work is satisfying in a different way. Her "Early Poem" revels in a subjective moment of learning:

I went out to lose my way in the gaze
of quieted animals
I untied the rope from the tangible brain

and received the seeds
of the next voice.

Her works often combine landscape and a deftly created speaker whose identity is paper-thin and severe both.

For its original translations and piercingly written author statements (along with an introduction by Hofer that details contemporary Mexican literary terrain), *Sin puertas visibles* is a successful anthology that may, as Hofer hopes, "widen...the conversation between Mexicans and Americans."

Stacey Levine's novel, Frances Johnson, will be published this summer by Clear Cut Press of Oregon.