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THE RECUPERATIVE WORK OF LOURDES ESPINOLA

Born in Asunción, Paraguay in 1954, Lourdes Espinola has published eight volumes of poetry. Her work has been reviewed by important writers of her country such as Roa Bastos. She has written poetry and criticism and has appeared nationally and internationally in literary magazines and cultural supplements. In 1997, a bilingual, French-Spanish anthology of her work was published by *Encre de femme*.

Usually Espinola has been seen as an erotic writer in whom feminine creativity confronts traditional patriarchies. Essentially, however, her project is a poetry of recuperation, at least three forms of which figure in her work. First, without doubt, is that of the feminine body. The second recovers unofficial, marginalized voices in the culture; and the third struggles to sustain life forces in constant opposition to death. Memory is the unifying factor of these three recuperative strategies.

The “misfortune” of being a woman, as one of her titles puts it, may be reversed by a process of awareness, summoned from memory, in which the subject recognizes her appropriation by others who would negate her self. Resisting that, she can desire herself for herself and refuse all that would consign her to passivity and death. This requires a daring leap, a “jump from the balcony,” if “she” is to command her own version of experience. Espinola was one of the first Paraguayan writers to confront Latin machismo as a woman speaking a woman’s desires.

The recuperation of marginal voices (although not of the language itself since Guarani is spoken on a par with Spanish in Paraguay), is a theme more recently initiated. It involves the presentation of voices which expand the capability of Paraguayan culture to converse with lost history. All the cultures that have suffered oblivion would be made present and contemporary, which is possible only through a synchronic memory in which writing records what our traditions deny: “Now, also,/ they are here.”

The third recuperative power underscores all the others and deepens Espinola’s poetry. Writing, by its nature, opposes death by refusing to erase from life the marks of death itself: oblivion, rejection, silence, and the cold. Espinola’s clearest image of this theme is the scar that reminds us of the wound but also of the cure.

—Monica Velásquez