

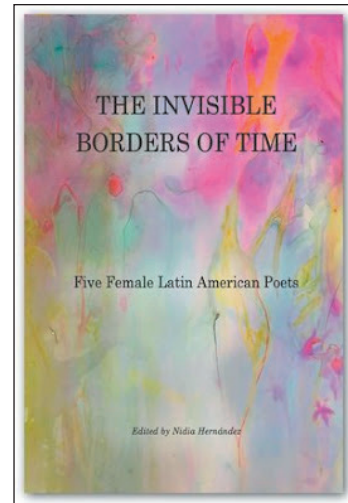
The Invisible Borders of Time: Five Female Latin American Poets
Edited by Nidia Hernández
(Arrowsmith Press) \$24.

Review by Hecmely Ferreiras

In an anthology of emotionally captivating poems, I was introduced to five female Latin American poets. These poets have carefully, yet effortlessly captured similar themes of motherhood, dreams, and quiet sadness. I enjoyed reading the Spanish versions of each poem and comparing how the English translations somehow miss out on a bit of the passion and intensity that the Spanish tongue offers. I chose two poems from each author to analyze and digest the depths of each line.

The first poet featured in this book is Cristina Peri Rossi. Peri Rossi is an Uruguayan poet whose romantic tone transports you into the scene of her words. As she said, “poetry is a perception, a state of mind”. Her poems offer a journey to a state of mind that she sets up in each line. In an untitled poem, the speaker recounts an unrequited love in which their partner is no longer with them. The last few lines spoke to me; “Excuse me, the literature killed me, but you looked so much like it.” This line brought a sense of reality as if the speaker was aware that their memories and desires are just words in a poem, and it killed them because those words reminded them of their lover. The next poem by Cristina Peri Rossi was difficult for me to understand. It wasn’t until the final line that I understood that the poem “Auto-da-fe” was leading to “I love you”. The lines describe mostly negative things mixed with beauty like “with destroyed palaces whose magnificent ruin we admire.” Peri Rossi sends the message that love is complex and lacks simplicity.

Piedad Bonnett is a Columbian poet that writes poems to express herself in that very moment. I agree with her that “there are things that only poetry can say”. You can hear the sorrow in her poems along with her strength. I can only imagine that poetry must have been a comfortable source after Bonnett lost her son in 2013. The poem “Guarding”, spoke to me in many ways. I interpreted it that the speaker has put a guard up to protect themselves, whether they realize it or not. The poem has a sad but also a hopeful tone. The speaker realizes that they have put up a wall and is aware that they are sad, but still remain fierce. The next poem I looked at by Piedad Bonnett is called “Kitchen”. The poem was dedicated to Maria Victoria. The poem centers on two mothers who talk “as if there were children asleep upstairs” but in reality, there was no one. It seems as if the two mothers were reminiscing about a time when kids were running around and playing music. The two mothers comfort each other with their losses. This poem in particular reminds me of the mothers with



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angels in my life. I recall a time when my family was gathered for Christmas and each woman in the room shared a story of the child they lost. Similar to Bonnett's poem, their loss provided "a bridge that united them, their hands holding on to the emptiness."

Yolanda Pantin is a distinguished poet of Venezuela. Her dreamy poems offer an escape from reality and into the descriptive scenery Pantin displays. The poem "Déjà vu" speaks about a dream in which the speaker was writing in a notebook. The speaker asks, "what were you for me, then, poetry?" In the dream, the speaker was a horse searching for the answers and found them in a notebook that said: "a, e, i,". The last line reminded me of elementary Spanish class where I would recite the vowels "a, e, i, o, u". At first glance, the reader may think, how are three letters the answer they've been looking for? It is because poetry is like vowels. You cannot live without it or speak without it. It flows naturally and there is no way to force a sentence without vowels. It made sense to me that poetry is like life support as vowels are to a complete sentence. The poem "Guerrero" is a short poem about the soul of a house. The English version of this poem confused me because at first, but after reading it in Spanish I interpret it as the soul of the house is protected and protective of others. This poem reminds me of the comfort of an ancient house.

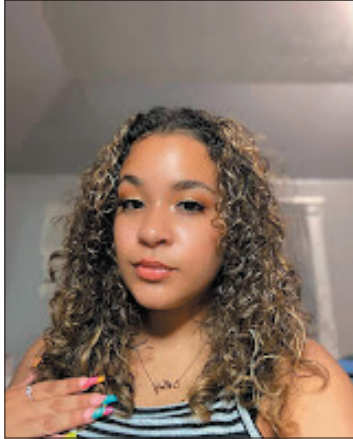
Carmen Boullosa is a Mexican author and poet. When reading her poems, I noticed the amount of description that delicately puzzles together into an image in your mind. In an untitled poem, Boullosa described the night as an "unmoved, peaceful skein of sound, large impenetrable serenity". The soft tone sets a calming mood that is homey and comfortable. In the last line, the speaker says that the night covers them "in the presence of clarity without borders". As someone who loves her country, I can only imagine that Boullosa writes about the Mexican night sky that is tranquil and silent. It reminds me of the nights in the Dominican Republic that are so rich in stars, incomparable to the smog-filled city in America that is always alive in the nighttime. This poem gave me sweet nostalgia and for a brief moment, I was in the presence of the unmoved night. When I first read the poem, "Vein", I instantly had the thought that it was alluding to the destruction of the earth. The "wound, incision, cut" to me relates to all the times we have hurt the earth. The last line sets a negative tone with the words "viscous, rotten, permanent, poisoned" to describe the open wound. It may not allude to the tarnished earth but it resonated with the impending planet we remain on and continue to harm.

Rossella Di Paolo is a Peruvian poet and teacher. I agree with Di Paolo when she states that "poetry gives shape (language and music) to the chaos that we all are and because of that we feel less perplexed, less alone". The poem "Fifteen Hundred" includes descriptive words of a goat climbing uphill. My favorite line is "a thorny sun that scratches my eyes. Like a lightning bolt of dust I grow". The impressive play on words brings me a sense of joy. The last poem I looked at is called "leave if you can II". This poem personifies poetry in a way that I can relate to. There are times when you are in love with poetry but other times when you want to remove yourself from the endless thoughts, lines, and rhymes cluttering your head. I love the line "I surrender always because I live in the house of poetry". Poetry is always something I come back to. It is always in my head when I feel intense emotions or when I tune into the lyrical genius of

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my favorite rappers. Poetry is a fantasy and an inescapable reality. It can be overwhelming at times, but I am always drawn to it.

Ultimately these poems have shown me that poetry comes in all shapes, sizes, and lengths. The featured poets in this book have reminded me of myself, my culture, and my connection to poetry. I am glad I am not the only one that thinks of poetry as a companion that we can confide in to express our emotions or just lay out our thoughts.



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