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**“EL AMOR... LOCA PALABRA”:
EROTICISM IN GIOCONDA BELLI’S
*DE LA COSTILLA DE EVA***

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The single most obvious thematic feature that distinguishes Gioconda Belli’s *De la costilla de Eva* (1986) from other poemarios produced in Nicaragua in the late 1980’s is its eroticism. One is struck first of all by the boldness of Belli’s language and posture in a national literature where women have traditionally been the object, rather than the subject, of erotic love, and where, as Beth Miller writes for Latin America generally, women have been “dichotomized, in moral terms, as either ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ icons worthy of veneration or more sexual fallen idols deserving of ridicule and contempt” (8). Belli’s extraordinarily broad treatment of the theme of love includes the obsessive recollection of the absent lover, the claiming of sexual satisfaction as an entitlement, the anguished remembrance of unfulfilled desire, feminist revisionist mythopoesis, the longing to inflict emotional torment, amorous craving, and instructions for the loving exploration of a woman’s body.

Sharon Keefe Ugalde lists the inclusion of eroticism as a major element in the creation of female identity in contemporary Latin American women’s writing:

Sexuality is the area.. where false stereotypes of women have been most stubbornly entrenched and where female difference originates. It is not surprising, then, that the articulation of women’s authentic identity should develop as one central component the complex of female sexuality, desire, and eroticism. (228)

Alicia Suskin Ostriker links the conscious ignoring of women’s sexual desire to a generalized denial of female assertiveness by hegemonic males:

We have now to look at a quite different form of female desire and to delineate an alternative portrait of female pleasure. For it is not only women's aggressive impulses which have been thwarted and made taboo... Her eroticism has suffered equally. Where female aggression has been twisted into manipulativeness, female ardor has been chained to submissiveness. To love, for a woman, has meant to yield, to "give herself." (165)

Jean Montefiore claims that almost any close study of women's poems will reveal an engagement with patriarchal tradition, including the sexual stereotyping of women (95-96). In Belli's poem "Anoche," the female *hablante* turns the tables by fantasizing a masculine sex-object:

Anoche tan solo
parecías un combatiente desnudo
saltando sobre arrecifes de sombras
Yo desde mi puesto de observación
en la llanura
te veía esgrimir tus armas
y violento hundirte en mí
Abría los ojos
y todavía estabas como herrero
martillando el yunque de la chispa
hasta que mi sexo explotó como granada
y nos morimos los dos entre charneles de luna. (79)

The representation of the male lover as a nude warrior, his athleticism and the woman's erotic receptivity may at first seem to be a concession to patriarchal stereotyping, yet the facts that this woman reciprocally interacts with the rhythmical sexual thrust of the man, as if this were not more powerful than her interaction with it, that the metaphors used to evoke both their sexual organs suggest equality of hardness and resistance, and that her orgasm defines the successful climax of the sex act, mark the poem clearly as a gynocentric fantasy that concedes superiority to the man neither socially nor in terms of sexual fulfillment. We may say the Belli appropriates the convention of a masculine poem in order to challenge the male's heretofore exclusive right to imagine the other in conformity with his own psychological needs.

The figure of *epitrocasmo*, a long series of short metaphors, used both to address and to define the male lover and to describe his relationship with the *hablante*, constitutes the largest portion of the first stanza of "Amor en dos tiempos." Two and one-half lines near the end of the stanza are mainly comprised of five imperative verbs with which she insistently invites the male lover to consummate a sexual act: "vení otra vez / llamame pegame contra tu puerto de olas roncadas / llename de tu blanca ternura silencíame los gritos." The final half-line expresses the desired effect of those commands: to feel opened, dissipated, scattered, spilled as a consequence of overfilling ("dejame

desparramada mujer"). This opening and dispersion of the **hablante** is not to be understood as strictly passive. We find throughout the poem a complementary and reciprocal action of filling the other without emptying oneself, of mutual penetration and enrichment. The insistent rhythm, supplied largely by the strong caesurae of the bi- and tripartite lines, suggests the intense desire for union with the beloved. At the same time, items in series, together with the periodic return of some leitmotifs recombined in alternation with new ones, create in the metaphoric expression of the erotic relationship a harmonious whole and a glorification of the lover through the multiplication of his names, as in a religious litany.

The sweetness in three terms of endearment in line 1,

Mi pedazo de dulce de alfajor de almendra,

returns in lines 3 and 4 in the sexual allusiveness of the pollen-sucking hummingbird,

colibrí picoteando mi flor bebiendo mi miel
sorbiendo mi azúcar.¹

In turn, this image continues the avian ones found in line 2, the first also clearly sexual and the second alluding to the Quetzalcoatl of **nahua** mythology, symbol of eternal return and endless life:

mi pájaro carpintero serpiente emplumada.

The next block (lines 4 and 5) of four consecutive subterranean images evocative of the penis's thrust into the vagina,

tocándome la tierra
el anturio la cueva la mansión de los atardeceres,

is followed (lines 6 and 7) by merging sea and bird images, of which the former stand in opposition to the underground ones immediately preceding while the latter take up again the avian theme of the poem's beginning:

el trueno de los mares barco de vela
legión de pájaros gaviota rasante níspero dulce.

A series of trees, alternating with an arborescent form and a religious symbol that could be a tree, form an extended signifying chain by virtue of their obvious references to the shape and motion of the male sex organs:

palmera naciéndome playas en las piernas
alto cocotero tembloroso obelisco de mi perdición
tótem de mis tabúes laurel sauce llorón

The evocation of a sexualized world continues through the remainder of the poem, with, among others, its images of water rushing through gorges ("cascada en mi cauce"), of a vigorous male animal playing in strongly scented woods ("venado juguetón de mi selva de madre selva y musgo"), and of an obviously vaginal musical resonance chamber ("castañuela cencerro gozo de mi cielo rosado / de carne de mujer").

In "Amor en dos tiempos," the transparency of the metaphors contrasts with the euphemism that usually characterizes Nicaraguan poetry, in which allusions to female sexuality are metaphorically more veiled and mediated. Moreover, the speaker's pleasure in evoking intercourse by means of as many different metaphors as she can invent turns sexuality into a poetic game, removing it from the realm of mystery and taboo and making of it an object of literary discourse. No longer a sacramentally sanctioned act for the purpose of producing children within a certain political economy, it is sheer pleasure — linguistic and sensual —, a source of joy unbound by the moral and social codes that tend to limit women to the harmful roles of either asexual icon or debased whore.² Ramiro Lagos has written that Belli

[r]epresenta una nueva conciencia gozosa de ser mujer y de no serlo sino también de saber cómo y en qué lo es y sobre todo por su misma condición de poeta, el gozo de revelarlo. (227)

From the universe created in this poem are excluded all considerations of virtue and sin, salvation and damnation. The lovers' bodies constitute the totality of flora and fauna, sky, sea, beach and earth, light and darkness, taste and sound, even the movement of air, in a universe where the only damnation possible is the coyly ironic one of innocent ecstasy ("obelisco de mi perdición"), where the only **talismán** necessary is the code of caresses, and where the freudian spectres of mystery and guilt are rejected in the subversively ironic reference to the lover's penis as "tótem de mis tabúes laurel sauce llorón." The **hablante's** erotic desire generates the form, constitutes the driving force, and defines the **raison d'être** of an intense, if short-lived, paradise.

At the beginning of "In memoriam" are found a generating simile and a pair of allied metaphors whose amplification over seven stanzas and 54 lines constitutes a **tour de force** of imagery unequalled in this collection. The **hablante**, explicitly compared with a cathedral and implicitly equated to a burning lamp and a priest, both contains and celebrates a memorial mass to the memory of an absent lover. This act of voluntary recall figured as a resurrection succeeds in making that lover so vividly present in her imagination that her tranquility is shattered. Bitter resentment of unrequited love replaces the sweetly sad remembrance of erotic pleasure, and she vows to try to stifle her memory of him... but not until the following day. The cathedral simile develops into an extended metaphor and spreads to the outer borders of the text with such expansive energy that the cathedral, the woman and the poem become coextensive.

The spatial openness of the Gothic “inmensa cathedra, / ahumada de tiempo y peregrinos, / abierta de vitrales” gives way to small closed interior spaces representing the woman’s memory, wherein she seek the lover: “Por los más oscuros pasadizos de mis muros internos, / a través de intrincados laberintos, / de puertas canceladas, / de candados y rejas.” As the woman’s body is sexualized in a metaphorical conflation of the Catholic mass and amorous union, she is seen as containing an altar, a reliquary and floral offerings: “alzo el manto que oculta quedamente el secreto, / te muestro el altar de los suspiros, / la caja cincelada donde guardo tus gestos, / el conjuro de rosas que perfuma mis huesos.” With the collapse of spaciousness into enclosure, the cathedral image evolves into one of monastic cloister. The tú, earlier represented as a sacred icon in the temple of love (“Tu efigie de largas vestiduras monacales”) is said to have inhabited “sus celdas enrejadas.” This ambiguity of the cathedral/convent space is preserved by the presence of “los murmullos, los cánticos” which are equally appropriate to either locus. The “lámpara ardiendo” image is continued in the simile “mi corazón semeja un cirio,” and the sacerdotal “esta noche oficio para vos / un *In Memoriam* cálido” is taken up again in “Oficio así esta resurrección, / este rito de invierno.”

Elsewhere, metaphoric inconsistency is an important source of the poem’s multiple possibilities of meaning. One encounters the confusion of actions, for instance, in strophes 2, 3 and 4, where the beloved appears clad in “largas vestiduras monacales,” but where those same garments become figurative in the *hablante*’s breaking out of a confining space that seems to represent chastity (“Arrastro las largas vestiduras del encierro”) before they return to the literal realm when she lifts “el manto [a word often used to denote a nun’s garment] que oculta... el secreto” in order to reveal her body, where the lover has “worshiped.”

Codes also become confused at times. While the *hablante* is at first a priest officiating at a memorial mass, later it is her beloved who is dressed as a monk, and he is eventually christologically apotheosized (“invoco tu nombre,” “esta resurrección”). Not only are the priestly and monastic roles not analogous to those of the separated lovers, but all three — priest, monk and risen god — are inconsistently employed within the hyperencoded overlay of Catholicism on eroticism.

In the third place, we are perplexed by interference among rhetorical levels. While in stanzas 1, 2 and 4 the *hablante* is metaphorically an immense cathedral, that edifice is personified again in a passage of heightened sexual referentiality: “Mi cuerpo tu perenne habitación. / Tu morada de las suaves paredes. / Quizás ya no recuerdes / cómo ocupabas sus entrañas, / sus celdas enrejadas” (emphasis mine).

These displacements and shifts do not seem to constitute a commentary on the nature of meaning itself. Rather, the poet has at her disposition such a wide array of allusions with which her reader is culturally familiar that she finds

readily available metaphors and similes suitable for each psychological and physical phenomenon that she wishes to poeticize. Although the overarching metaphorical framework is unified, then, Belli reserves the privilege of varying the choice of specific features of Catholic liturgical and monastic imagery that she will exploit, as well as their metaphorical relationship to the psychological drama that she is elaborating, seeking consistency only within the space of each stanza. For example, the fact that the woman's body is a cathedral in the initial strophe signifies her being filled with spirit of the revered but absent lover, while her body's becoming a convent or monastery in the fifth permits the poet to create a feeling of sexual intimacy. This process also holds for the other inconsistencies in the poem's system of imagery. Most intriguing is the poet's reversal of the device, favored by some Spanish mystics, whereby the religious experience of union with God is expressed in amorous terms. This metaphor places Belli in a line of direct descent from Decadent and Modernist poetry. In "In memoriam" the religious code serves to express erotic love, including transparent references to female physiology

As the woman becomes erotic subject in contemporary poetry, she assumes roles that she has never before been permitted to play. The last three poems I examine deal with the refusal of the role of passive object in the love relationship, the desire to create a new consciousness in the lover, and a set of detailed instructions on how to explore and make love to another person's body.

In order to love a man without sacrificing herself, the *hablante* of "Furias para danzar" feels that she must give vent to an anger whose apparent target is her lover himself but whose real source seems to be past experience in love. She admits unabashedly that she has loved at least several men with extraordinary expectations: "En todos he buscado la luna, / los flujos y reflujos, la marea." This psychological disposition, which is an integral part of the myth of the male as organizer of woman's experience, is recognized as a trap into which this woman finds herself nearly slipping again: "Mas heme aquí levantando arenas en castillos de agua. / Heme aquí danzando alocadamente espejos sin imágenes." The simultaneous expression of loathing and love that follows is the result of a consciously formulated emotional self-defense: "Te desdengo y acaricio los rizos negros / de la cabellera." Far from overcoming the relationship of domination and submission that often presides over male-female couples, here Belli simply reverses the roles: the *hablante* will cause the man to love her so much that if they should part he will be tormented by her memory: "Te dejaré tatuado de ruiseñores. / Creceré enredaderas en torno / a tus noches lejanas. / Las espirales de este tiempo que se esfuma / te traerán en el olor de las azaleas / esta mujer que cantó / contra Penélope." Certainly the poem is not resolved in favor of "the imperative of intimacy." The rejection of passivity is in itself, however, an especially potent message in a society where female victimism is epidemic. Here, the spiteful harpy is not the invention of a misogynistic mythology, but rather the violent revolt of a woman aware of the oppressiveness of the

Penelope-Ulysses syndrome and seeking to express her own truth as a social witness from an oppressed group (Donovan 101).³

The revision of the biblical myth implicit in the collection's title, *De la costilla de Eva*, is bodied forth in "Magias para desencadenar," in which a demiurgic woman, by dint of will and imagination, creates a man in her own image and a world suitable for framing her passionate love for him. Her repeated use of the hypothetical subjunctives **quisiera** and **hubiera querido** is less an admission of her inability to transform the real world than it is a statement of the insufficiency of reality to create the conditions for the perfect expression of her love. Her expression of erotic volition bypasses love poetry's traditional functions of praising the qualities of the beloved, lamenting unrequited passion or describing the delights of fully shared sentiment. The egotism, determination and hyperbole of this poem recall those of "Furias para danzar," to which it is also linked by the structure of its title: a noun expressing superhuman force + a preposition of imminent potentiality + a verb expressing the sudden release of that force.

This will to power is partly manifested in verbs of creativity, persuasiveness and even coercion,

Yo hubiera querido **inventar** la magia / de **hacerte**...
 Yo quisiera **convencerte** de que...
 ...quisiera / **inventar** un modo para que...

partly in terms of excess of the absolute,

un...**ensordecedor** torrente de miel
 ... quisiera / despertarte Adán frente a la **única** Eva posible del mundo
 ... que **constante** dibujas / la silueta de mi recuerdo
 ... que el horizonte / puede abrirse como un **inmenso** telón
 ... las puertas / de cálidas horas **interminables**

and partly in the imagined ability to contravene the laws of nature

inventar **la magia** / de hacerte crece un ramo de begonias /
 en medio del pecho
 convencerte de que el horizonte / **puede** abrirse como un
 inmenso telón / desde donde asomarnos al borde de **otro**
Universo / en que la intensidad de un girasol / **puede**
 encender los pétalos del día

or to enchant a mind,

Quisiera que mi mágico sombrero / **provocador de**
ilusiones y tiernos **deseos** / — irresponsables y
 atrevidos — (emphasis mine)

This *hablante* "quisiera transformar tantas cosas," including the body, will, perception and memory of the beloved, but also the effect that he has on her. She would like to be as totally absorbed by her love for him as she wishes him to be by his for her. The poem thus traces a circular process in which the force of love releases the power of desire, which in turn provokes the ability of the imagination to conceive of a magic that will create a love whose reciprocity will justify the force of her passion. She seeks what all lovers do: to project her will onto the other, so that both will simultaneously desire the same things. In doing so, she inscribes herself as creator of a universe and of a male lover, both subordinate to her will, and so assumes a prerogative heretofore reserved to hegemonic phallogocentrism.

In *Le blason de corps féminin*, male French Renaissance poets symbolically exercised their gender's perceived right to control, define, appropriate, and aesthetically judge — even to dismember and reassemble — the female body by "celebrating" in verse various of its parts — one per poem — and anthologizing these in order to fabricate an ideal woman. The net effect of this literary alienation of women from their bodies was to convert them into superficial constructs devoid of affective and intellectual dimensions and to rid them of those physical characteristics that lay beyond the comprehension — and thus the control — of men, traits which made women a threat to their keepers and traders. And so men wrote out of women their physical strength, their desire for sexual satisfaction, and their menstruation, leaving them, among their differentiating characteristics, only their virginally maternal and aesthetic qualities. Beginning with the finding, based on an examination of early human cultures, that "las imágenes arquetípicas y primordiales de la mujer han sido, desde sus orígenes, proliferaciones de la mutilación inicial que sustrajo de ella únicamente su valor como cuerpo reproductor" (7), Lucía Guerra-Cunningham traces the development of the European female literary character and her eventual migration to Latin America in the form of the virgin-temptress dichotomy with its underlying fear of female sexuality:

La castración erótica del personaje literario femenino responde, en esencia, al vigor de una ideología masculina que... supone a la mujer como un individuo mucho más susceptible al deseo sexual y que, por consiguiente, requiere regulaciones estrictas que se plantean en el discurso teológico recurriendo a los mitos de la castidad y la pureza. (10)

She concludes by affirming that even in the case of modern Latin American novelists who reject stereotypical characterizations of women, their very transgressions are oppositionally controlled by the codes which they are attempting to contravene (11), and that women authors' chief task is to write from their own experience with no reference to phallogocentrically formulated literary norms (15-19). Central to female experience is gynocentric body consciousness. Hélène Cixous' now famous "injunction to 'write the body' is

one of the most urgent and controversial imperatives pronounced by contemporary French feminism" (Lindsay 47).

In Belli's "Pequeñas lecciones de erotismo," a poetic voice, putatively neither feminine nor masculine, gives to a man a detailed set of instructions on how to explore, make love to, and give and receive sexual gratification through, a woman's body. That body is not an object to be exploited for one-sided pleasure, for it too is attached to a pleasure-seeking sensor. The erotic tutee is enjoined to give as much pleasure as he can in order to maximize his own, an economy of generosity in which nothing is lost but in which there is more for both. Here, no one dominates, no one submits, and both gain.

By contrast with the intrastanzaic logic of the religious metaphors in "In memoriam," the metaphor of a circumnavigation of the earth to express the exploration of the lover's body is logically coextensive with the entire 59 lines of "Pequeñas lecciones de erotismo" (here, read both "stanzaic brevity" and "detailed" for "pequeñas"). Before entering into the physiological details, the didactic voice exposes the basic metaphor, the delectation in whose minute elaboration (*le plaisir du texte*) rivals that of the tactile, olfactory, visual and gustatory pleasures that lie ahead for the pupil:

I

Recorrer un cuerpo en su extensión de vela
 Es dar la vuelta al mundo
 Atravesar sin brújula la rosa de los vientos
 Islas golfos penínsulas diques de aguas embravecidas
 No es tarea fácil — sí placentera —
 No creas hacerlo en un día o noche de sábanas explayadas
 Hay secretos en los poros para llenar muchas lunas

II

El cuerpo es carta austral en lenguaje cifrado
 Encuentras un astro y quizás deberá empezar
 Corregir el rumbo cuando nubehuracán o aullido profundo
 Te pongan estremecimientos
 Cuenco de la mano que no sospechaste

The polysemic nature of the highlighted key-word at the end of line one alerts the reader to the layering of meaning throughout the text, since *vela* may signify "sailboat," referring to the learner's voyage; "sail," referring to that which propels the traveler; "vigil," that which causes one to be wakeful an entire night; and "pilgrimage," implying a religious quest ending in a state of grace. If the body is an encoded celestial navigation chart for the lover, so is the poem itself, with the resulting conflation of body and poem that we have previously observed in "In memoriam." In fact, Belli seems to have taken to heart Hélène Cixous' advice to the "New Woman" to liberate herself from oppressive codes

by “writing herself” and by “[putting] herself into the text — as into the world and into history — by her own movement” (Running-Johnson 485).

The *lenguaje cifrado* of the poem-body-map is sometimes fairly transparent in its references to copulation, and it is meant to be, since the fun lies in playing with the metaphor of sailing, not in euphemizing sex:

Repasa muchas veces una extensión
Encuentra el lago de los nenúfares
Acaricia con tu ancla el centro de lirio
Sumérgete ahógate distiéndete

...
Dobla el mástil hincha las velas
Navega dobla hacia Venus
estrella de la mañana
— el mar como un vasto cristal azogado —
duérmete náufrago.

The lover is enjoined from quickly satisfying his ejaculatory urge:

Instálate en el humus sin miedo al desgaste sin prisa
No quieras alcanzar la cima
Retrasa la puerta del paraíso

Proper love-making also involves smelling and tasting a body:

No te niegues el olor la sal el azúcar.

Every part is an erogenous zone; the feet, for instance:

Pie hallazgo al final de la pierna
Persíguelo busca secreto del paso forma del talón
Arco del andar bahías formando arqueado caminar,
Gústalos

not to mention the ear:

Escucha caracola del oído
Cómo gime la humedad
Lóbulo que se acerca al labio sonido de la respiración

Even normally indiscernable bumps on the skin must be delicately carressed:

Poros que se alzan formando diminutas montañas
Sensación estremecida de piel insurrecta al tacto

Throughout the poem, Belli manages, with very few exceptions, neither to stray

from the generative maritime metaphor, nor to let the reader lose awareness of the human body underlying it, nor to allow the readability to vary either by obscuring the codes or by slipping to far into literality.

In *De la costilla de Eva*, Belli provides a complex perspective on female eroticism. Together with its companion volume, the novel *La mujer habitada* (1988), this **poemario** goes a long way towards breaking out of the normative limits set by the male literary Establishment and in founding an expanded poetics of eroticism in Nicaraguan letters. For all its newness in the reduced context of her homeland, Belli's erotic poetry must be appreciated in the wider scope of Latin American literary history. Its primary antecedent is most certainly the love poetry of Delmira Agustini, with which Belli shares some important thematic and stylistic traits.⁴ To show that Belli is not an isolated case in contemporary Latin America, it is useful also to point to the eroticism in the poetry of the Uruguayan Morosa de Giorgio.

Belli celebrates coitus with a fantasized male lover with a joyfulness free of all social fetters, claiming sexual gratification as an entitlement. Appropriating the role of creator of the universe and generator of the second sex, she sings the beauties of love in an ecstatic earthly paradise that is without good and evil. She places Catholic iconography in the service of eroticism in a complex extended metaphor. Unleashing complex desires — both malevolent, for the purpose of self-defense, and inventive, for the purpose of transforming an unworthy world — she violently rejects the role of passive love-object in favor of that of aggressive subject. Finally, she authoritatively presumes to instruct the male in the ways of achieving maximum mutual gratification through the proper ways of exploring, caressing and penetrating a woman's body.

In the poems analyzed above, as well as in others such as "Esta nostalgia," "Petición," "Sin palabras," "Signos" and "Evoluciones," we find an extraordinary outpouring of erotic love expressed either in beautifully wrought extended, swelling metaphors or in cumulative waves of shorter ones that break in rapid succession upon our consciousness. The affective, psychological and physical self is described in a dizzying variety of terms involving landscape, meteorology, birds, mammals, vegetation, sounds, minerals, water, wind, temperature, light, darkness, human physiology, architecture, colors, astronomy and geothermal action. Love is the consuming passion that requires all of language and the entire physical world to describe, an obsessive force to be both feared and desired, but especially to be excruciatingly felt and furiously expressed with every bit of poetic skill that Belli can muster:

Es esa palabra conjuro de todas las magias,
látigo sobre mi espalda tendida a filo del sol,
desencajando el tiempo con sus letras recónditas,
desprendida del azar y de la lógica,
loca palabra...

("Signos")

NOTES

1 In Belli's novel *La mujer habitada*, published two years after these poems, the dead Sandinista revolutionary hero becomes a hummingbird, as do all warriors who perish in combat, according to *nahua* mythology:

Murió al amanecer. Retornó al lado del sol. Es ahora compañero del del águila, un quauhtecatl, compañero del astro. Dentro de cuatro años retornará tenue y resplandeciente huitzilin, colibrí, a volar de flor en flor en el aire tibio. (301)

In a lyric poem that serves as an epilogue to the novel, two women fighters, one a *Conquista* era Indian and the other a contemporary Sandinista, become flowering fruit trees at their deaths; their lovers will feed on their pollen, fertilizing them in turn by the process of cross pollination: "Colibrí Yarince / Colibrí Felipe / danzarán sobre nuestras corolas / nos fecundarán eternamente" (338). Here is the "mutuality and interpenetration" posited by Suskin Ostriker as the model for amorous relationships in much contemporary women's poetry.

The basis for this belief is found in *nahua* epic poetry, as in the following lines found in Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's interpretation of Indian codices:

Cuantos cayeron muertos... y cuantos han ofrecido sacrificios a los dioses, pueden contemplar al Sol, pueden llegar hasta él. Cuando han pasado cuatro años se mudan en bellas aves: colibríes, pájaros moscas, aves doradas... o en mariposas blancas relucientes... y suelen venir a la tierra y liban en rojas flores que semejan sangre.

(Garibay 21-22)

While Belli appropriates *nahua* myth in order to impart meaning in the poem, she associates with the colibrí-flower interaction a personal conception of the ideal relationship between a man and a woman as elaborated in her novel. This includes freedom from any manipulation, inequality, patronization or exclusion from any phase of the partner's activities, thoughts or feelings. Interestingly, the sexuality that Belli celebrates in isolation in the poemario becomes at a certain point in the novel a method of evasion from true communication between the protagonist and her *compañero*. A valid love relationship is eventually defined in *La mujer habitada* as part of an overall blending of existences in which each partner retains complete integrity and imparts total respect.

2 The right to happiness through sexual satisfaction and the primacy of female desire are also the fundamental themes of "Petición," in which the impatient woman demands of her lover "Vestime de amor / que estoy desnuda; / que estoy como ciudad / — deshabitada— / ... / Rodeame de gozo / que no nací para estar triste / ... / Quiero encenderme de nuevo / ..." (25).

3 The relationship of Penelope and Ulysses in an important negative model in the novel *La mujer habitada*, where the heroine rejects the debasing and developmentally paralyzing role of "el descanso del guerrero," the sexual and emotional consoler of the tired and distraught male revolutionary, the portion of normalcy in his otherwise perilous and unpredictable existence. She constantly refers to the mythological Greek woman who subordinates her own desires to the hero's wanderings and exploits. Rejecting that model of female behavior, she joins the Sandinista Front herself, achieves military status equal to her lover's, and eventually dies in an anti-Somocista assault.

4 In Agustini's *El libro blanco* (1907), "Amor" is a beautiful sonnet composed of three dreams of the beloved; the intensity and energy of its metaphors, as well as their hyperbolic and elaborate character, foreshadow Belli's lyrics; in the Agustini poem, however, we encounter vestiges of Modernism that are totally absent in Belli. Despite the blatant sexuality of "Supremo idilio" (in *Cantos de la mañana*, 1910), this decadent blend of eroticism, heightened masochism and revived iconography of le **romantisme frénétique** is far from Belli's aesthetic.

Los cálices vacíos (1913) will find numerous echoes in Belli's poetry. In "Ofrendado el libro," Agustini's conception of erotic love resembles the Nicaraguan's in that it is the source of great pleasure and great suffering, but Agustini's notion of love is more Baudelairean than Belli's figuring as it does the **postulation double** of human nature simultaneously verging toward salvation and perdition. "Visión" centers on the topos of the nocturnal embrace of the lover that we find in Belli's "Anoche"; Agustini's unequivocal evocation of sexual intercourse by means of an extended series of similes and metaphors will be repeated in several of Belli's texts. In "Otra estirpe," the Uruguayan poet's female **hablante** prays to her God Eros to deliver to her the male object of her sexual desire, and the entire sonnet is marked by the precision of its biological details. In "El cisne," Agustini sexualizes this most asexual of nineteenth century poetic birds, challenging poetic tradition in her defiant refusal to yield to Modernist tendencies either to desexualize human experience or to sublimate human sensuality into aesthetic abstractions.

El rosario de Eros (1924) also contains a number of parallels with Belli's poetry: the recollection of many past lovers in "Mis amores" makes us think of "Furias para danzar"; as we see in "Serpentina," Agustini, more than any other Latin American woman poet before Belli, writes her body unabashedly ("Mi cuerpo es una cinta de delicia, / glisa y ondula como una caricia / ... / un cuerpo largo, largo de serpiente, / vibrando eterna, ¡voluptuosamente!"; and the metaphor of the woman's body as "una torre de recuerdo" and of her soul as "un castillo desolado y sonoro" will be echoed in that of the cathedral in Belli's "In memoriam."

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