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Review / Reseña

Alfonsina Storni: Un libro quemado. Eds. Mariela Méndez, Graciela Queirolo, and Alicia Salomone. Buenos Aires: Editorial Excursiones, 2014.

Escenas de la vida moderna: Alfonsina Storni's Cultural Revolution

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Alfonsina Storni (1892-1938) was emblematic of the complex negotiations of values and identity in Latin America at the beginning of the twentieth century. Around the time that nations throughout the Americas marked their centenaries, an excitement imbued by legislative and technological modernization was undercut by the persistent, if not yawning, gap between lettered elites and wider publics. Aesthetic and social values that typified global modernity were experienced not so much massively as by select representatives from nations who wanted to have cultural ambassadors to the world stage, if they could not immediately incorporate the latest fashions into middle-class lives. Both Buenos Aires

and Storni's place within Argentina's intellectual circles is exemplary of this moment in Latin American history, and that she was not only fluent in the feminisms that circulated throughout the Western world but also translated them into day-to-day *porteño* life through op-ed columns in widely read magazines and newspapers is, with the benefit of hindsight, revolutionary. This is not the kind of revolution that gets televised, but the kind that slowly encircles a set of values through the creation of a community of letters.

In reading the thoughtfully put-together collection of Storni's op-ed columns, *Alfonsina Storni: Un libro quemado*, edited by Mariela Méndez, Graciela Queirolo, and Alicia Salomone and recently published by Editorial Excursiones, one cannot help but think that an apt title for the collection may have been "Escenas de la vida moderna." Preceding Beatriz Sarlo's collection of essays by half a century, it is interesting to note the sort of opportunity that Storni opened up for female cultural agency and how similar essays look against the backdrop of updated philosophical fashions at the end of the twentieth century. Méndez, Queirolo, and Salomone account for this updating of Storni's work by organizing her essays around six axes that are meaningful to the social and cultural present. The sectional division ("Modelando feminismos," "Urbanas y modernas," "Lectoras y escritoras," "Mujeres que trabajan," "Masculinidades," and "Rituales e instituciones") do the double duty of tracing an intellectual arch in Storni's work and directing the reader more interested in referencing a single theme toward the periodization of her writing career. In this sense, the book is both catalog and retrospective.

The risk of curating a collection of essays on a writer that is held dear to a range of academics and lay readers is to leave out a popular essay or to frame the author in a way deemed to be unpopular or, worse yet, unsubstantiated. The well-worded introduction to the collection keeps such anxieties at bay by explaining the origins of the project and its framework. In the introduction, we see what both Storni and the Argentine woman were up against. Méndez, Queirolo, and Salomone give an account of the working conditions, the domestic expectations (cleverly as detailed by advertisements in the same magazines in which Storni published her

columns), and general political shortfalls that females experienced in the Argentina of Storni's day. This discrepancy naturally bled into the world of letters where Storni was turned into a caricature—"una poeta de mal gusto alejada de estilos vanguardistas y como una suicida heroica atormentada por el desamor y la enfermedad" (8).

Such trying circumstances are naturally framed by an air of triumph in the text. After all, it is Storni who will go on to gain a fame and respect envied by her detractors. As such, there is a strange pleasure derived from reading these essays in the knowledge that women will make strides in Argentina as the century progresses and that Storni's work will outlast her critics. But that the book is still necessary, and not simply as cultural artifact, alludes to the notion that there is still some distance to travel. This is where the collection leaves room for growth and, perhaps, a future study. The editors use updated gender theory in the introduction, and that they dedicate a section to "Masculinities" marks an attempt to keep Storni relevant to academic currents. Yet, the reader is left wanting to learn more about how Storni's writings are not simply relevant to today but how they can be used to build upon gender theory. These further steps might not be easy. As many gems as there are in Storni's op-eds and as cutting edge as so much of her feminism remains, there are moments that appear naive in the light of the present. While these moments do not reach the same level of retrospective naivety as Julio Cortázar's Cold War stances, to give one example of the bold views of a well-respected fellow Argentine that have not aged well, columns like "Los defectos masculinos" present intellectual notions that have largely been left in the past. That such sentiments feel out of place in today's gender trouble, however, is a testament to the progress inaugurated by committed writers like Storni.

The very nature of a collection of opinion pieces that were published in popular magazines and newspapers means that *Alfonsina Storni: Un libro quemado* is not designed only for academic reference. Readers interested in her work, feminism, or early twentieth century life in Buenos Aires will find the collection of essays and ruminations insightful and enjoyable. By the same token, the book should be staple reading for academics studying Storni and will serve well in courses taught on Latin

American modernism and feminism. This crossover appeal is natural for a writer who, in precisely the work collected in *Alfonsina Storni: Un libro quemado*, brought big ideas into the living rooms of so many Argentines.