

## RESEÑAS

FRANCESCA DENEGRÍ: *El Abanico y la Cigarrera: La primera generación de mujeres ilustradas en el Perú*. Lima, Flora Tristán Centro de la mujer peruana/Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1996.

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This is by far the best and most extensive study to date of the concerns and public presence of women writers in Lima in the mid-19th century. It includes excellent analysis of the overlap between political culture and literary culture during that optimistic era of peace (before the War of the Pacific) and prosperity (guano exports), and the various chapters describe the effects of liberal positivism, the extensive participation of women writers in a new culture of literary periodicals and literary gatherings, and the topics and strategies of women's writing. Also included are fascinating sections on the changing fashions in women's dress (with the disappearance of the traditional *tapadas*, women uncover their faces as their words, too, are more often exposed to public view), the differences between Andean and coastal Peru, and the opening doors of education for women beginning in the 1870s. Works of fiction by the most prominent women writers of mid-century Lima are analyzed within the contexts of discussion of the inclusion of the traditionally marginalized (Gorriti); polarities of civilization and barbarism, upper and lower class, self and other (Gorriti, González, Cabello); and, finally, a new valorization of indigenous Peru in the writings of Clorinda Matto de Turner.

*El Abanico y la Cigarrera* is the first serious attempt to gather and integrate the components that made literary culture in Lima between the late 1840s and the late '80s so extraordinarily dynamic. It includes perceptive discussion of many of the new periodicals that reflect the cultural, literary and political ferment of that era, such as *La Revista de Lima*, *El Correo del Perú*, *La Alborada*, *El Ateneo de Lima*, *El Perú Ilustrado* and others, and Francesca Denegri's interpretative readings of novels and short stories are well

combined with her analyses of social issues. At the same time, however, it is a very ambitious book, undertaking to characterize an era of dramatic change and the writings of so many very different writers, and some of its underlying generalizations and framing devices seem insufficiently explained or quickly glossed over.

Denegri says that this book desires to “dar inicio a un enfoque sistemático de la historia de la literatura femenina en el Perú” (12) and to show the important role of women writers in the mid-19th century enterprise of cultural modernization, but to repeatedly emphasize that this is “la primera generación de escritoras peruanas” (15) is to dismiss several centuries of distinguished women who wrote and who participated actively in the cultural life of their times, leaving written records of this participation. Only once does Denegri refer to earlier women writers –when she mentions the 18th century Lima *tertulias* of Manuela de Orrantia, where she recited her poetry (120)–, although it would surely strengthen her discussion to include some of the precedents in Lima society for women’s literary activity before the emergence of “mujeres ilustradas” in the very particular mid-19th century sense defined here.

Other framing boundaries seem arbitrary, too. While, certainly, the focus on Peru (and on Lima) is in itself a large topic, a little more discussion of the similarities (and differences) between Peru, Argentina and Chile might illuminate, especially since the Argentine Juana Manuela Gorriti is –very appropriately– one of the major writers included in *El Abanico y la Cigarrera*. Narrowing the context to Peru makes the whole discussion of Gorriti a little awkward, since she spent her adult life shuttling between Argentina and Peru, writing lovingly, enthusiastically and sometimes wistfully about both countries. It seems odd to ignore the substantial Argentine discussion of her work, recent reeditions (of almost all her books) and important critical works (for instance, the essays in Cristina Iglesia, ed., *El ajar de la patria: Ensayos críticos sobre Juana Manuela Gorriti*, Buenos Aires, 1993 or Lea Fletcher, ed., *Mujeres y cultura en la Argentina del siglo XIX*, Buenos Aires, 1994). Denegri speaks of Gorriti as a forgotten writer, but in Argentina she is not.

The Argentine part of Clorinda Matto’s life is similarly truncated at the end of the book, which concludes with a luminous and moving celebration of *Aves sin nido*, as well as excellent discussion of *Herencia and Indole*, but does not hint that Matto kept writing after she left Peru and settled in Argentina. That last section of *El Abanico y la Cigarrera* is somewhat mystifyingly entitled “Ocaso de la Escritora Ilustrada” and begins with a distinction between Clorinda Matto and the Lima-bred writers who, in the euphoria of the new prosperity that brought in a flood of French fashions, new European foods

and other imports, pursued “una identidad moderna que percibían como blanca y europea, [que] produjo un discurso cultural que categóricamente excluía la presencia indígena” (160). Denegri provides perceptive discussion of how Matto upholds traditional southern Peruvian values, portrays Andean Peru accurately, and “con *Aves sin nido*, ...desplazó el centro del poder revolucionario, colocándolo, no en la oficina del gobernador, en la corte judicial o el confesionario del cura, sino firmemente dentro del hogar y el lenguaje de las mujeres” (193). This affirmation of women’s strengths and community loyalties presumably represents the demise of the city sensibilities of the escritora ilustrada. But the book ends there. Denegri does not suggest the presence in literary history of the next generations of strong-minded women writers who will carry the banners and keep publishing.

*El Abanico y la Cigarrera* is a very good book. It is also a beautifully produced book, well printed and sturdily made, with a wonderful reproduction of Federico Torrico’s 1872 “La dama del abanico” painting on the cover. It includes a section of reproductions of photographs of the women writers featured in the book, and the title engravings of *El Correo del Perú*, *La Alborada* and *El Perú Ilustrado*, which, as I pointed out earlier, Denegri analyzes very effectively in the text. The bibliography is a disappointment; the footnotes document references with academic precision, but many of the major sources are missing and the selections seem arbitrary and meager. Maybe the next edition can include more information. This is a wonderful first book in an important field (Peruvian cultural history) which should be of great interest to everyone curious about Peru, the 19th century, and the presence of women writers.