

News Release

Book review

Leading Dom. Republic poet publishes new book in St. Martin

EDITOR'S NOTE: Chiqui Vicioso is one of the leading authors of the Dominican Republic with 20 books to her name. *Eva/Sion/s*, the newest volume of poetry by Vicioso, was published by House of Nehesi Publishers in St. Martin, in June 2007. *Eva/Sion/s* was also the main book launched at the 5th annual St. Martin Book Fair. The Cuban critic and erudite scholar Emilio Jorge Rodríguez delivered the book review below at the book launch (6/2/07). *Eva/Sion/s* is the first book by this important Caribbean author to be published simultaneously in three languages in one book [Spanish (*Eva/Sión/Es*), English (*Eva/Sion/s*) and French (*Éva/Sion/s*). *Eva/Sion/s*.

Presentation *Eva/Sion/s*

By Emilio Jorge Rodríguez

Abundant words and concepts show the world the multiplicity of ethnic and cultural roots converging in this *Mare Nostrum* that at the same time draws us together and apart. Also, in enlightened occasions, in fields other than scholarly exegesis, our Caribbean has had the fortune of being grasped and acknowledged by artistic creation. This is the case of the volume of poetry in *Eva/Sion/s*, a book open to a sensitive interpretation of the region where we live. Its author, the Dominican writer Sherezada Vicioso, submits this Caribbean, the home of hybridization and interbreeding, to her individual appropriation of a transmuted mythology from its original pureness and symbology.

“Everything will have to be reconstructed, intended anew, and the old myths, reappearing, will offer us their spells and their enigmas, with an unknown face” is the epigraph by Cuban poet José Lezama Lima that precedes the book and serves as its guiding thread, since the poetic text embodies the specific redrafting of a cosmogony that, because of its diversity, becomes universal without abandoning the aftertaste for Creole erudition or cast anchor in an alien port.

In this piece of work we hit upon the transmigration of mythological beings through an unprecedented syncretism. Sherezada (or Chiqui) Vicioso does not want to confine herself exclusively to the transcultural elements endorsed or coined by the history of migrations that have forged Caribbean demography. She will build her text through references to characters and places linked to Amerindian, European, African and Asian mythologies, at times juxtaposed for emphasis so as to show a path and an itinerary synthesizing individual biographies and historical collective essentials. Collective and individual elements interweave through the acknowledgement of an underlying geography that will suffer a metamorphosis in the construction of an identity, with the

incorporation of spaces that the author and national history have claimed as their own. Individuality, however, reveals the transformation in the identity of the feminine subject through painful vicissitudes, daily or transcendental rejoicing, ontological agonies and those conditioned by social confrontations and anguish. A previous poem by Vicioso, “Un extraño ulular traía el viento” (“A Strange Wailing of the Wind,” 1985), linked her experiences with the purpose of offering an early cosmovision built from a poetic art in movement, growing and maturing in human sensitivity.

From its first stanza, *Eva/Sion/s* establishes itself in the kingdom of a Paradise of unusualness: “The fish were swimming/ out of water/and it was normalto encounter birds/ in the roots of trees.” Chiqui uses these concise and synthetic lines to portray a marvelous universe not as an artful device or a spell to captivate readers – although she undoubtedly does so – but as an evidence of an initial Chaos announcing the cartography of what is fantastic and unusual. The overflowing of imagination is also given expression to through the appropriation of mythologies that do not appear in the Caribbean space, at least not with a transparent presence or a proven significance in regional human history, as those having to do with a profusion of real or fictitious islands, as distant as Iceland or Penglai Shan in China.

With this new poem or saga, Sherezada Vicioso establishes a link with her initial poetry that is endowed with a narrative and intimate conversational tone – not the intimacy of the isolated being, but an intimacy attached to circumstances and to a topography of the soul, at times melancholic, solitary, testimonial; others, intent on yearned for or discarded ideals and dreams – and also with her previous foray into the limits of concrete poetry in *InternAmiento* (1992). She also clears the path for a synthetic evocation of Caribbean essences, with reminiscences of Anglo-Saxon imagism, an aesthetic revolution in the early years of the 20th century and of which she offers a novel conceptual version.

A clear focal point of the book is gender awareness (the division into syllables of the title creates a polysemy with “Evasions” as a sublime escape of artistic work and the eternal migratory condition of Caribbean people, as well as the statement that “Eve” is the “Sion of the condemned/a mound turned into a valley of tears”). Thus, she identifies with the immortal and seductive Hindu aquatic nymphs: “Pointe-à-Pitre/ Finis Terra/ of the unattainable/ where I encounter again/ in the piercing blades of the foam/ my sisters of worship/ the Apsaras,” who are also linked with the veneration to the mother goddess.

This conviction lights up not only her dramatic and poetic production, but also her essays. In 1991, she published *Algo que decir (Something to Say)*, the first analysis of feminine literature in the Dominican Republic, where she reaffirmed the creative capacity of women writers:

“In this discovery of the multitudinous power of words, we find that we are not alone, that we are not as fragile and then we are overwhelmed by the elation that Eve should have felt when she began to name things and, when naming them, discovered that she endowed them with life, that words could defeat with their spell the suspicion of

loneliness, the sensation of vulnerability always lying in wait behind every faith, every proclamation.”¹

The sea, the marine element surrounding our countries, is also to be found in her work at all times, as is the acknowledgement of the significance of African contribution to Dominican culture, something not too easily admitted and rather traumatic in Dominican national society that in this last book reaches a higher level of subtlety and elaboration, when recognizing in the Caribbean an undeniable universality, a right to artistic and intertextual appropriation because of its multiethnic and multicultural nature. It is worth remembering, since we are in another island in our Caribbean with an inner border line, that all the above leads to search for a harmony with Haiti, the other side of her shared half island, expressed as a conviction: “Ignorant of decrees / illiterate / life makes its way / among scattered frontier markers,” lines that perhaps can only be put on the same level with the declaration by her fellow countryman Manuel Rueda: “No land or one land, the delivery of an island where the sun is born in skies that will not be divided.”²

And, last but not least, I would like to express that this book, simultaneously published in the three most extended languages in the region – in excellent versions in English, by Judith Kerman and Fabian Adekunle Badejo, and in French by Camille Aubaude and Daniella Jeffry – is the dream of every Caribbean editor with a prominent self-esteem. We should thus pay homage to the House of Nehesi Publishers for having made this dream come true.

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¹ Sherezada Vicioso: “Johanna Goede o la literatura como supervivencia”, *Algo que decir (Ensayos sobre la literatura femenina, 1981-1991)*, Santo Domingo, Editora Búho, 1991; 2nd. ed. increased, 1981-1997, 1998, p. 74.

² Manuel Rueda: *Las metamorfosis de Makandal*, Santo Domingo, Departamento Cultural, Ed. del Banco Central de la República Dominicana, April 1998, p. 9-10.