



Loose Woman

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In “Night Madness Poem,” Sandra Cisneros identifies her main speaking voice in this collection: “I’m the crazy lady they warned you about./ The she of rumor talked about—/ and worse, who talks.” These are mostly love poems, spoken by a mature woman who loves hard, who takes risks and accepts the consequences. She takes and abandons lovers and is abandoned in turn. She experiences the ecstasy and pain traditionally identified with women in love, but embraces these experiences with abandon, swagger, and joy. Sometimes victimized, she refuses to let the victim’s role define her. This attitude is evident in a long title: “I Am So Depressed I Feel Like Jumping in the River Behind My House but Won’t Because I’m Thirty-Eight and Not Eighteen.”

In these often witty poems, one especially humorous strategy is role reversal. In “Full Moon and You’re Not Here,” the speaker opens in the traditional male voice, calling the lover who has had to leave to pick up a son at scouts, “Cinderella.” Only in the last few lines does it become clear that the voice complaining of the lover’s inconvenient family ties is female. In “Los Desnudos,” she imagines her lover in the position of Goya’s THE NAKED MAJA. In “Down There,” she opens with a portrait of a male proud of his rebellious enjoyment of filth, then takes her turn to glory in the beauty of her menstrual blood.

Although it is sometimes helpful to know Spanish, nearly all of these poems communicate upon first reading. With more familiarity, one sees ever more clearly how they are funny, rich in allusion, and thought-provoking, and how they revel in the power of language to make love and to break things.

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