

DAISY ZAMORA

CLEAN
SLATE

new & selected poems

translated by
Margaret Randall & Elinor Randall

curbstone press

Contents

Translator's Note	11
<u>1968-1978</u>	from <i>The Violent Foam</i> de <i>La Violenta Espuma</i>
Carta a una hermana que vive en un país lejano	16
Letter to My Sister Who Lives in a Foreign Land	17
Solamente te digo	20
I'm Only Warning You	21
Cuando te vas por la mañana	22
When You Leave Each Morning	23
Como explicarte	24
How to Explain	25
Precisamente	26
Precisely	27
Hemos ido juntando	28
We've Been Gathering	29
Para mi abuelo Vicente, desde Enero hasta su muerte	30
For My Grandfather Vicente, from January to His Death	31
El final	38
The End	39
Cuando regresemos	40
When We Return	41
Canto de esperanza	42
Song of Hope	43
Comandante Dos	44
Commander Two	45

Mi prima Mercedes	48
My Cousin Mercedes	49
Reflexion sobre mis pies	50
Reflecting Upon My Feet	51
Lamento	54
Lament	55
El rayo de sol	56
Sunbeam	57
Hasta las últimas consecuencias	58
To the Last	59
Fiel al corazon	60
Faithful to the Heart	61
Fiel ama de casa	64
Loyal Housewife	65
Emilia, la enfermera	66
Emilia, the Nurse	67
Otilia planchadora	68
Otilia, the Ironing Woman	69
La mesera (3)	70
Waitress (3)	71
La estrella de Teresa	72
Teresa's Star	73
Querida tía Chofi	74
Dear Aunt Chofi	75
Afeites de la muerte	82
Death's Makeup	83
Campo arrasado	86
A Leveled Field	87

Al parto	88
Going to Give Birth	89
Era una escuadra desperdigada	90
It Was a Ragged Squadron	91
Radio Sandino	92
Radio Sandino	93
Reportaje de la protesta frente a la embajada de Estados Unidos por las maniobras Pino Grande	118
Report of the Demonstration in Front of the U.S. Embassy Protesting the Pino Grande Maneuvers	119
Encuentro subrepticio con Joaquín Pasos	122
Surreptitious Encounter with Joaquín Pasos	123
Carta a Coronel Urtecho	126
Letter to Coronel Urtecho	127
50 versos de amor y una confesión no realizada a Ernesto Cardenal	130
50 Love Poems and an Unfulfilled Confession to Ernesto Cardenal	131
Voy a hablar de mis mujeres	134
I'm Going to Talk About My Women	135

1993

New Poems

Poemas nuevos

Cancion de la nieta como reina heredada	142
Song of the Granddaughter as Heiress Queen	143
Divisar la muerte	144
Anticipating Death	145

Vuelvo a ser yo misma	146
I Become Myself Once More	147
Súplica al último hijo	148
Entreaty to the Youngest Child	149
Sin respuestas	150
Without Answers	151
Día de las madres	152
Mother's Day	153
Los vecinos	154
Neighbors	155
Mensaje a los poetas	156
Message to the Poets	157
La bestia y su domador	158
The Beast and His Tamer	159
Tu perfección es	160
Your Perfection Is	161
Noticia en el supermercado	162
Supermarket News	163
Lassie (autobiografía)	164
Lassie (Her Autobiography)	165
Alter ego	166
Alter Ego	167
Adiós del ama de casa desempleada	170
Goodbye from an Unemployed Housewife	171
Trámites de divorcio	172
Divorce Proceedings	173
Marina	176
Seascape	177
Requisitos para ser reina de belleza	178
Requisites for a Beauty Queen	179

Mensaje urgente a mi madre	182
Urgent Message to My Mother	183
Contamos con que estás	184
Taking You for Granted	185
Mujer para la especie	186
Woman for the Species	187
Ser mujer	188
To Be a Woman	189
Linaje	192
Lineage	193

TRANSLATORS' NOTE

Daisy Zamora's is a strong and evocative presence. Her generation, and particularly the women of her generation, came of literary age in a country known for its poets — the way other countries are known for beaches, bananas, diamonds, or international bullying. In Nicaragua, *Poeta* is a title of honor as well as an endearment. Daisy grew into womanhood and into her own full voice in the context of extraordinary popular struggle, and she herself was an important protagonist in that struggle. Daisy's poems are passionate and incisive, whether they speak of losing a child at birth or shout out in the radio syllables of underground war communiques.

Zamora, born in Managua in 1950, grew up in a home both typical and atypical of her class and culture. On the one hand, there were all the accoutrements common to the life of a protected young girl who is sent to those religious academies charged with molding their spirits and expectations. Mysterious spinster aunts and a sister who early on emigrates to the United States walk in and out of these poems. On the other hand, Daisy's grandfather was a powerful self-affirming influence in her childhood. And she remembers — at the age of four — seeing her father's photograph on the front page of the daily paper; she had been told he was away on business but the image clearly placed him in the middle of a group of insurgents who had been caught and imprisoned attempting to overthrow Somoza García (father of the dictator who, years later, would be forced from Nicaragua by Daisy and her comrades).

Long a poet and painter, Zamora was professionally trained as a psychologist. She married young, and — not uncommon among the women of her time and place — became involved in early revolutionary activity alongside her first husband, Dionisio Marengo (the Dionisio of the poem "It Was a Disperse Squadron"). But she quickly found her own creative niche in

struggle. "Radio Sandino," one of Daisy's best known and most powerful works, a centerpiece in this collection, intersperses her own voice reading communiques over the FSLN's¹ clandestine radio during the war's final offensive (May through July, 1979) with more personal musings as she makes her way back to a house in the night or imagines her mother and great aunt picking up the air waves from their exile in Honduras.

Daisy Zamora is a poet's poet. Deeply influenced by the friendship as well as by the literature of some of the greatest Nicaraguan writers (and she evokes them in these pages: Joaquín Pasos, José Coronel Urtecho, Ernesto Cardenal, Julio Valle-Castillo, Vidaluz Meneses), her work is populated with the literary references of a language, and a continent. It is rich and evocative, but not overburdened with historical data. And, because she is Nicaraguan, her poems are frequented by death.

But Daisy is also a people's poet — a rare combination. "Report of the Demonstration in Front of the U.S. Embassy Protesting the Pino Grande Maneuvers," and poems like "Waitress (3)" or "Otilia, the Ironing Woman" that evoke the lives of working people, come directly out of her revolutionary experience and sensibility. "Song of Hope" and "When We Return" could only have been written by a poet from Nicaragua, or Vietnam — countries that have known war and natural disaster for generations. Among much else, Daisy's poems are also a compendium of local flora and fauna — both real and imagined.

There are several themes that repeat and build upon themselves in this collection. One is the poet as woman: breaking through the limitations imposed by family and society,

¹ The Sandinista National Liberation Front, political vanguard of the Nicaraguan revolution and organization of which Zamora is a member. The FSLN was founded in 1960, spent many years organizing a successful political and military struggle, and led the Nicaraguan people to the overthrow of the dictator Somoza Debayle in July of 1979. Ten years later, unable to dispatch debilitating military aggression, in devastating economic chaos, and under overwhelming pressure from the United States, it lost the 1990 elections. The Party remains the country's single most viable political force, however, still controls some spheres of public life, and remains the only hope for a future of justice.

reflecting upon her strong feet and dreaming herself out of a complacent life. This female (and feminist) self-examination emerges in several fine poems about women family members and friends, and finds what is perhaps its most moving expression in "Death's Makeup," her tribute to the great Nicaraguan combatant Nora Astorga as she dies of cancer. "Commander Two," about Dora María Téllez,² is also historically interesting as well as poetically powerful.

Motherhood, its joys and sufferings, is another subject to which Daisy returns more than once. The reader will be deeply touched by some of her almost haiku-like windows on the loss of a baby, or pieces like "Mother's Day" in which she tells her children that she "advance(s) holding to the hope / of some distant port / where you... / will pull in one day / after I have been lost at sea."

We have decided, for chronology's sake, to arrange this collection at least somewhat in the order of the poems' publication in Spanish. That is, a selection from Zamora's 1981 volume *The Violent Foam* appears first, followed by some of the poems that make up her 1988 collection, *En limpio se escribe la vida* (which we have taken the liberty of translating as *Clean Slate*). The book ends with twenty-two newer and previously unpublished poems. Within this general organization, we have placed poems with common themes together, but also tried to allow for the complexity of Daisy's voice — which so successfully brings intimate memory into political verse or unexpectedly turns the full force of social commentary loose among the lines of a love poem.

The translating was done by a mother and daughter team. Elinor (the mother) produced first drafts of many of the poems; Margaret (the daughter) worked them into their final form. At ages 82 and 55, ours has been a long-awaited and happy

² At 22, Dora María Téllez was one of the leaders in the FSLN's takeover of the National Palace in September of 1978. Later, she commanded the liberation of the city of León. During the decade of Sandinista government, she was Minister of Public Health and Vice President of the National Assembly. Today she remains a Sandinista deputy to that governing body.

collaboration. In the final phase of this project, we were fortunate to have input from Daisy herself; she revised and approved every one of the English versions.

Very little literary license has been taken in these translations. Where necessary a colloquial turn of phrase in the Spanish has been coaxed into its English equivalent, but always in an effort to produce a similar emotional charge. When we've felt it was important, occasional footnotes have been added to explain historical references an English-reading audience might otherwise miss.

When the Sandinistas took power in 1979, Daisy Zamora came out of clandestinity to take her place in the continuing struggle to change her people's lives. During that extraordinary decade (1979-1990), she worked for the FSLN's National Directorate, headed an Institute of Economic and Social Research, and — in her role best known to those outside the country — was Vice Minister of Culture when Ernesto Cardenal was Minister of that government entity's most exciting early years. And she never stopped being a poet. In fact, her political involvement feeds and is distilled in many of these poems.

Since the Sandinista's electoral defeat in February of 1990, Zamora — along with several generations of fighters, and Nicaraguans in the larger sense — has been struggling for political and economic survival. Married to Oscar-René Vargas, a brilliant economist who has written a number of books on Nicaraguan political and economic history, she lives with him, a daughter from her previous marriage, and their two small sons. She has worked sporadically as a psychologist, taught literature at the Central American University, anthologized the poetry of Nicaraguan women, and continues to write. Of late, she has been active with groups of women who are looking at feminist issues in an impoverished and war-torn nation.