

THE POETICS OF TRAUMA AND HOPE IN *WOUNDED WATER* BY ANABEL TORRES

LA POÉTICA DEL TRAUMA Y LA ESPERANZA EN *AGUA HERIDA* DE

ANABEL TORRES

CECILIA CASTRO LEE*

University of West Georgia

Fecha de recepción: 17 de febrero de 2011

Fecha de aceptación: 3 de mayo de 2011

Fecha de modificación: 16 de mayo de 2011

RESUMEN

Wounded Water / Agua herida (Bogotá 2004) es un libro de poesía bilingüe de la poeta colombiana contemporánea Anabel Torres (1948). Esta obra ofrece un encuentro poético con el trauma o “las pequeñas sacudidas personales” de las que consistía, en esencia, la poesía de Charles Baudelaire para Paul Valery. Torres escribe de su vida cotidiana como mujer, como poeta y como emigrante radicada en Europa durante las últimas dos décadas. Propongo que *Wounded Water / Agua herida* es poesía de supervivencia, similar a la que Gregory Orr define como “poesía lírica de transformación”. El campo semántico del agua en la poesía de Torres conceptualiza un amplio espectro de ciclos vitales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: trauma, lucha, peregrinaje, esperanza, supervivencia.

ABSTRACT

Wounded Water / Agua herida (Bogotá 2004) is a bilingual book of poetry by contemporary Colombian poet Anabel Torres (1948). This book offers a poetic encounter with the trauma or “minute personal shocks» Paul Valery cites when referring to Baudelaire’s poetry. Torres writes of her everyday existence as a woman, as a poet, and as an emigrant living in Europe for the last two decades or more. I contend that *Wounded Water / Agua herida* is poetry of survival, similar to what Gregory Orr defines as “transformational lyric poetry”. The semantic field of water in Torres’s poetry conceptualizes a broad spectrum from birth, death, and rebirth.

KEY WORDS: trauma, struggle, journey, hope, survival.

* Ph.D en Lenguas romances y literatura española y latinoamericana. Emory University.

*Shuffled from one place / to another /.../ I fiercely try to reconstruct a home /And to hang out the
breezy sunny solitude of my window / Back there /
Anabel Torres, Wounded Water*

The study of trauma is a new genre in contemporary literary criticism which intends, as one of its purposes, to validate the therapeutic value of the creative writing / reading process. In *Voices in Wartime*, anthology editor and film producer Andrew Himes states: "If history and literature have taught us anything, it is that in the midst of trauma, violence and death, it is the poets who help us make sense of the senseless" (1). Likewise, Professor Sven Birkerts, in the aftermath of 9/11, and "in the face of a collective sadness," proposes that: "Disaster requires poetry. We read poetry because we need something to hold against horror. Not because poetry overturns or disarms horror, but because it helps restore the delicate inner balance we call sanity. Disaster calls poetry to action". (*The New York Observer*. New York, NY. October 1, 2001)¹

In his book, *Poetry as Survival*, Gregory Orr offers a description of trauma in terms of the individual's awareness of order and chaos:

Our day-to-day consciousness can be characterized as an endlessly shifting, back-and-forth awareness of the power and presence of disorder in our lives and our desire or need for a sense of order. Most of us live our lives more or less comfortably with the daily interplay of these awarenesses, but in certain existential crises, disorder threatens to overwhelm us entirely and in those cases, the very integrity of the self is threatened, and its desire or ability to persist is challenged. (4)

Baudelaire's poetry illustrates a paradigm for the experience of trauma in people's daily lives. French poet Paul Valerie points out that the essence of Baudelaire's poetry is precisely a depiction of "the minute personal shocks of everyday life in modern times" (Ulrich 1). Moreover, Kevin Newmark remarks that Baudelaire's shock experience becomes "the law and principle of modernist writing" (241), and, finally, Walter Benjamin suggests that there is a "subterranean shock" inscribed in Baudelaire's poetry causing an "unexpected bump, jolt, or shock in the reader" (241). The struggle to restore order in one's life becomes a part of the art of living and the art of surviving.

I am particularly interested in the concept of "the minute personal shocks of everyday life", or the daily trauma inherent to the human condition, and how it is

1. Birkerts introduces W.H.Auden's poem, "September 1st 1939", to his creative writing class as a means to help his students cope with the trauma of September 11, 2001: "Waves of anger and fear / Circulate over the bright / And darkened lands of the earth, / Obsessing our private lives; / The unmentionable odor of death / Offends the September night." (www.mtholyoke.edu/offices/comm/oped/poetry.shtml)

manifested in *Wounded Water* (Bogotá 2004) by Anabel Torres. The poems in *Wounded Water* are testimonial of the poet's personal yearnings for stability, love, and solidarity, while acknowledging her solitude, uncertainty, and fear. There is indeed "a subterranean shock" in her poems, balanced with the poet's efforts to surmount the initial trauma. This struggle is at the core of what I denote as the poetics of trauma, hope, and ultimately, survival. Orr claims that "survival begins when we translate our crisis into language where we give it symbolic expression as an unfolding drama of self and the forces that assail it" (5).

It is my contention that the poetry of Anabel Torres in *Wounded Water* actualizes the traumatic experiences of her daily existence as a woman, as a poet, and as an emigrant living in Europe during times of stressing social and economic changes, resurging violence and even terrorism. Her poetry becomes poetry of survival, or a means to heal the wounds and a way to seek fulfillment, similar to what Gregory Orr defines as "transformational lyric poetry." Orr insists, however, that one must not try to identify the source of a poet's trauma. Instead he sees that "we need to go in the opposite direction: recognizing that the poet's trauma initiates the struggle of transformation that leads to the incarnation of the poems" (4).

Wounded Water / Agua herida is a bilingual book of poetry by contemporary Colombian poet Anabel Torres. It was the author's desire to create a parallel version in Spanish and English by using the two languages that she masters. In the Preface, she indicates that: "Like more and more people today, I am lucky enough to have two sets of everyday china in which to serve up words... This book gathers my versions of poems written first in English or in Spanish... But as they move from one set of dishes to the other, my poems do change, not even deliberately" (*Wounded Water* 6). Consistently in the text, the page on the left is the English version, and the one on the right is the Spanish version. The titles of the poems could be direct translations, for example, as in "Past and Present" / "Pasado y Presente" (16, 17), or "And Silence slips like Soap" / "Y el silencio se desliza como jabón" (78, 79). Often, however, titles do vary, as in the case of "On Being Split" / "A la escisión en sílabas y frases" (18, 19). Moreover language, context and cultural connotations impact on readers' perceptions. The Spanish title, "En la noche de San Juan" (71), for instance, carries cultural implications associated with religious and folk festivities for the Spanish speaker. An English speaker in the English version may have a different reaction to the title "On the Eve of St. John" (70).

Torres is a translator by profession and a poet by vocation. She has been awarded international prizes in both endeavors. *Wounded Water* is, in Linda Lappin's words, "a linguistic experiment" in which one ponders which version is the original and which

one is the translation. Lappin, an American writer and a translator herself, insists that “The bilingual poet has a greater challenge in eking out an original voice in two tongues. In this regard, fidelity to the original becomes an even keener issue than it normally is Fidelity to which voice, to which word?” (“The Poet Disrobed and the Naked Translator”). In the copyrights page of *Wounded Water*, Torres claims the two versions as her own: “Spanish versions by the author, *Versiones en inglés de la autora*.” This article is based on my presentation at a Literary Conference at Florida State University, in Tallahassee, Florida, in January of 2005, where I had the opportunity to introduce the poetry of Anabel Torres to an English-speaking audience.

Wounded Water is Torres’s first bilingual publication. It is also her eighth book of poetry. For *Casi Poesía* (1975, 1984), her first publication, Torres was awarded the Colombian National Poetry Prize by the University of Nariño, and her next book, *La mujer del esquimal* (1981), was awarded the Second National Poetry Prize by the University of Antioquia. Other works are *Las bocas del amor* (1982), *Poemas* (1987), *Medias nonas* (1992), *Poemas de la guerra* (2000) and *En un abrir y cerrar de hojas* (2003). In 2009, Torres published *Human Wrongs and Other Poems*, a collection of poems written in English and awarded the *Rei En Jaume* Prize for Poetry in English by the *Ajuntament de Calvià* in Mallorca.

Anabel Torres was born in Bogotá in 1948, grew up in Medellín and lived in New York for part of her formative years. She published her first poetry book in the seventies, along with other poets known as the “*postnadaístas*.” This group of poets has been called «the disenchanting generation» and also the «generation of the National Front». Antonio Caballero describes the poetic mood of this group as affected by “disillusionment, disenchantment, or better yet, deceit; or to be more precise, the fear of being deceived” (*El Espectador* Nr.143, December 22 1985. The translation is mine). The historical period known as “La Violencia en Colombia” (1948-1970) is part of these poets’ childhood memories, followed by the unsatisfactory political alliance of the National Front. A feeling of deception, turned into apathy, permeated the Colombian political and social arena at the time. This atmosphere produced a poetry marked by uncertainty and rebelliousness.

According to Pedro Lastra, these poets are heirs to the self-reflective poetic attitude of Octavio Paz and the ironic and self-mocking poetic vein of Nicanor Parra (qtd. in James Alstrum 516). Also, this generation includes the proliferation of women poets in Colombia. María Mercedes Carranza, Renata Durán, Orietta Lozano, Amparo Villamizar, and Anabel Torres, among others, join their names to those of male poets such as Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, Juan Manuel Roca and Carlos

Vásquez-Zawadzki. The poetry of this generation exemplifies Colombian postmodernity and is associated with the well-known poetic journal *Golpe de dados*, edited by poet Mario Rivero. In addition, the voices of North American women poets have influenced Torres's generations. The poetry of Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton and Erika Jong has permeated the poetic atmosphere of their time.

The vision of life and art expressed by Torres in her earlier poetry is characterized by a zealous concern for authenticity in women's lives. Her poetic voice evolves from denunciation and rebellion against the patriarchal structures and the cultural and literary myths that subjugate women, to the production of reflexive, both painful and joyful, self-constructive poetry of affirmation. Erotic love is expressed in lyrical images fused with love, desire, and passion, which shape her creative work. Life and literature merge in a lingering metaphorical construct².

In her book, *Poemas de la guerra* (2000), Torres becomes deeply concerned with the political and social reality of Colombia. Through her poetry, Torres attempts to give a voice to the hundreds of thousands of victims of violence during her lifetime. It is poetry of dissent and an angry protest against the culture of death, war, and violence in the whole world. During her years of self-exile in Europe, and as a feminist and human rights activist, Torres has heatedly proclaimed her revolt against all wars. The poem "Spattered" is an example of the trauma that filters through her life: "I'm from my homeland / War / Split off / Its side / and I'm still / Spattered / In its blood" (unpublished manuscript in English by the poet).

In my study, I will focus on three trauma and survival motifs that appear interlaced in *Wounded Water*: First, trauma in the journey or the "poetry of the transient"; *Wounded Water* unfurls a new landscape in Torres's poetry. Europe and the European experience, with its daily minute or momentous jolts in countries where she has either established residence or lived significant personal encounters with her writing, foster her poems – Holland, Switzerland, England and Spain. Colombia and the United States, as landscapes of the soul, have been left behind along with childhood. The speaker of Torres's poems is a pilgrim poet who offers both a detached testimony and a confession of emotional, tangible instances. In second place, we find trauma related to encounters and separations, as those inherent to love and death. Feelings of loss, grief, and sadness inhabit these poems, but terrifying moments of violence, both domestic and global, are also to be gleaned. In its maturity, this poetry is never judgmental but rather yields

2. See my article, "Lo existencial femenino: Eros y poesía en la obra de Anabel Torres" en *Literatura y diferencia, Escritoras colombianas del siglo XX*. Vol.II. Eds. María Mercedes Jaramillo, Betty Osorio de Negret y Ángela Robledo: Bogotá: Ediciones Uniandes, Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 1995. Impreso.

images of the world we create, or destroy, around us. Lastly, I will refer to the incarnation of trauma in Torres's self-reflective poems.

Trauma is at the core of the semiotics of *Wounded Water*. Wounds appear in the form of sorrows that linger, disturbing happenings, and feelings of isolation. Emotions such as loss and grief are woven into an intricate texture of water images. The poem "Wounded Water" (14), which opens the book, portrays life as a constant struggle in order to escape life's traps and overcome the crises threatening stability. Endless sinking and soaring, instigated by memories and desires, characterize her journey through life's water. The poem also offers a glimpse of possibility and self-awareness. Here the imagery of water is a powerful tool used to depict the human body and its troubled soul.

Days of rain,
Rivers waded
To which I can't return,
Puddles in which, reflected,
Life got trapped
And couldn't escape but stayed

Seas
That separate
Clear water, murky
Ponds
And the ocean of heaven with its crimson glow (14)

The semantic field of water in this poem conceptualizes a broad spectrum. It connotes time and space, memories and mutations, primordial waters and life cycles, surfaces and depths, unfulfilled love and desire, and passion held onto as a promise, like the future is also a promise.

Streams
In which memories sink and soar
And passions for the future run amok. (14)

Water encompasses the entire human experience from the physical human body, liquids in the form of placenta, tears, sweat, to the abstract inner life of thoughts and emotions, from birth to death, and rebirth:

Life, all in all,
Springs, wells,
Reservoirs,
Fountains, jets and the liquids of the body,

Drops, oceans and placentas
Men and Women at birth,
80% loved water,
Wounded Water. (14)

Throughout *Wounded Water*, reality is conceived in terms of fluids expressed in concrete visual, auditory and tactile images, which soon acquire a metaphoric value. Images of surging sea waves reflect emotional turmoil, fear, and strife. Essentially, water is life permeating life in all its instances, and life, apart from wounded water, is also loved water. The rushing swerve of the sea becomes a metaphor for the overwhelming force of love, as in the poem “The Tattooed Couple” (104), in which “Love is eternal. / Behind them the sea / Rolls, lapping, rocks lurch. / The sea pours into our second-class carriage / But the tree of love renders it harmless (106). By contrast, dreams are like bright and short-lasting bubbles that burst in the air, a metaphor for the cruelty of violence and terrorism depicted in “You are only young once or Friday after class” (184). An explosion of tears, “liquid pearls”, becomes a form of catharsis in “Miriam’s tears” (118). The text itself is fluid, dynamic and self-revealing. Language itself, which is precious and partakes of the water of life, may also be a source of contention and clashes: «Words pulled us on the shore / Then cast us back into the water” (162). Water, then, symbolizes the unknown with all its uncertainties. Water evokes two opposite values, wonder and astonishment or disaster and commotion.

The external structure of *Wounded Water* reproduces a cycle of twelve months, from March 2004 to March 2005. Each month has an average of six or seven poems. Consequently, every poem has a temporal subtext opened to new meanings and contexts. The seasons of the year as well as historical events, present circumstances, and a variety of landscapes offer such subtexts. Encapsulated in time and space, as in a photograph, each poem imparts flashes of life with its daily strain or wonder. The poetic journey, then, becomes a poetic journal. The internal structure of *Wounded Water* takes the form of a personal journey, with a clear point of departure but with an undetermined destination. The unknown may be presented as joyful anticipation or as a frightening abyss. The poet awakens to the dynamics of time. Human beings are time-bound. Time is at the root of our daily trauma.

The poem entitled, “Past and Present” initiates this journey. It begins with a recollection of the poet’s parents. In a Proust-like fashion, her involuntary memory evokes: “The smell of my father, / My mother’s voice: / Flags of their being / Past, / Awakenings” (16). The poet depicts the separation from them with dynamic images: “I speak now / having traversed my mother’s voice, / She the road, / Me the flying hoop / Bumping

along” (16). Conjuring childhood memories that cannot be relived and contemplating the unavoidable passing of time may become painful, but survival dictates that one must let go in order to journey on. In a last farewell to her parents, the pilgrim poet confesses: “Grateful, / Loving them both / I swing through / Life’s gates / Seeking the new sounds and smells / Of my present life” (16). The poet journeys physically and emotionally away from her homeland and her past. In *Wounded Water*, the lyrical subject no longer dwells on sorrowful and nostalgic reminiscences about Colombia’s violence and tribulations, as in the earlier *Poemas de la guerra*. On the contrary, as evidenced in “Past and Present” there is an emotional departure from yesterday while she “swings the gates” to a new beginning. She follows a bumpy road with its daily minute shocks towards self realization. This poetic journey signifies the art of living and surviving.

In “Three Gypsy Girls in the Metro” (182) the speaker describes the gypsy girls, “Severe and sensual,” travelling between school and home, “...Jewels / Safely glowing / By the hearth / After dark / After they come home from school”. Their journey back and forth on the metro, serene while “crunching pistachios between their teeth”, somehow redeems part of the anguish and toil of their people in the past: “Gypsies have drawn / Their wagons / Across centuries, / Land, languages” (180). Spain is the land of these gypsy girls and the poem takes the reader to the depth of a *Cante Jondo*.

The poem “More Re: Life” narrates an encounter of two likely middle-aged people on their “first real date”. The place is Amsterdam Central Station. The encounter is marked by the anxiety that both experience. Trauma is manifested in subtle ways as the poet claims: “There are too many uncertain factors in Life: / Too many / Tests, / Too few really new choices. / Too many redundancies. Not enough correct answers” (22). The poem is imbued with feelings of restlessness and the encounter becomes a trial with the possibility of failure. There is always hope lurking in the distance as an answer to the poetics of trauma. But, hope provides an ironic twist: “Yet hope always / Arrives / On the platform of / Life / With its broad foolish grin” (22).

In the poem “Choices” (68), anxiety increases with the awareness of the limitations of the human mind. The setting of the poem is a beach where the countless grains of sand become an image of life’s countless choices: “There is so much / Sand on the beach / That choosing one handful above another / Is irrelevant.” The task at hand is to make do with what we have, as the poet reflects: “The important thing / Is to clasp that fistful of sand / That we do take home / And cherish it.” The fear of not making the right choice while time elapses leads to the poet’s final warning: “Not try to count it / But hold onto it / And try not to let / Those tiny grains of sand / Slip through our fingers” (68). In this manner, trauma is tempered by wisdom, commitment, and affirmation.

The poet's circumstance as an immigrant living in several European lands, seeking acceptance and stability, becomes a source of emotional turmoil. In her poem "On being split", the poet laments: "An infinite wholeness / I never achieve" (18). Like many immigrants, she feels divided, as if living in between two worlds: "The split / Infinitive." Poetry, however, allows a lyrical transformation: "I lay myself / Out / Into / Syllables / And / Sentences" (18). In his book, *Magical Criticism* (2007), Christopher Bracken states that "The poet's task is to find words that share the self-actualizing energy of natural beings", and that, "Poetry is not the imitation but the completion of nature, its blossoming" (19). The creative art of Anabel Torres abounds in images that open hidden depths.

Images of motion and dislocation reflect the trauma of the transient poet in *Wounded Water*. The physical and emotional displacement of the poetic subject is expressed in travels, transfers, transitory stages, encounters and departures, fatigue and agitation. Sometimes, the pace is slow and monotonous, a deceptively bland routine; at other times, it is swift and terrifying. Helena Araújo indicates that "In *Wounded Water* Torres weaves a semantics of the transient, imposing on her poetry cycles of renewal and diffuse eroticism" (back cover *Wounded Water*). The poet is eager to take possession of new spaces, new landscapes by walking, pacing, roaming, sleepwalking or by rapidly travelling in a vehicle. In the poem "Looking out the train window" (132), the poet becomes emotionally engaged with the flashing landscape: "Sometimes / A thing of beauty / Stirs in me". Suddenly she wants to take charge of her own life: "{I} Take the bow / Of my life / Among the grazing cows / And rolling landscape." The lyrical voice turns to her art, yet pain is evident as a sense of failure, and trauma lingers: "I paint / The painting, / Dance / The dance / I will never dance /... / And I cry / - N

o need to have it show - / For my paint tubes / Lying quietly / In their boxes / While my life / Noisily whizzes past me" (132). The fear of missing her own path while time whisks by fills the poet's voice with apprehension.

In the poem "Thoughts on a Train to Rotterdam" (156), Torres acknowledges her need for order and stability: "Shuffled from one place to another / ... / I fiercely try to reconstruct a home / And to hang out the breezy sunny solitude of my window / Back there" (156). But because hers is a poetry of affirmation and survival, the crafting of the self also involves the art of transforming pain into joy, as in the poem "Crying before the beating of a jeweled heart by Dali": "Each pain / Cuts the jewel of being / Into facets / Facets / That later / Glisten / In the Dark / Beckoning joy". The poem ends with a fervid call for happiness: "Joy, come, / The heart is red / And beating / Once more / Beating" (32).

The poet becomes aware that the task of reconstructing her own self is as arduous and painful as the task of writing her poetry. John Wilcox indicates that “The notion that woman writer descends into a cave to retrieve the lost self is fundamental to feminist thought” (7). He adds that “for French feminists, the cave is the uterus, a locus of *jouissance*”, while for North American feminists, the cave is “the cave of her own mind” (9). The lyrical subject in *Wounded Water* travels horizontally always gazing at others who pass by, seeking understanding, expressing solidarity, witnessing their love and their sorrow. The shadow of the other is there as wonder or as commotion. Her journey is also an inner journey towards intimacy and connectedness. The cave into which the poet descends is both her own womanhood, anxious to connect with the other, and her mind, which is in constant alertness, as she realizes that “I’ve changed, my dreams are jumbled” (168). The poet anxiously seeks clarity and rejects confusion in her life.

Encounters and separation in love and death is a trauma and survival motif in *Wounded Water*. Love is conceived primarily as absence, a faded memory or an evoked presence. Love permeates the text with images of anxious anticipation and dissatisfaction, yearnings for the unattainable, as felt by a woman. Dissatisfaction can evoke different moods, though, as in the poem “Don’t Want to Write” (144), in which Torres humorously exclaims: “Don’t want to don’t / Want more / I just want more!” (144). Expressing loss and grief in another poem – “I Cry over a Ham Sandwich” (172) – where humor is juxtaposed, in spite of the theme, by the unlikely mention of a sandwich in a sorrowful love poem, the poet dictates her daily journal: “It’s noon, / The Hague, / And we take different trains. / You’ll go to Spain / And then return to Cali / ... / And on my way to Utrecht / Sitting next to the window / I cry over a ham sandwich” (172).

“CV or Profile” (26) dramatizes the disenchantment of the speaker who has not given up searching for a loved one entirely but is open to the possibility that she may never find him. “Used to cast stones” is the image for “chasing after love”, something that she used to do in the past. “Only I don’t cast stones / Or boulders / Any longer.” Her solitude, however, does not lead her into despair, and the poem has an open ending in the form of a question: “But I did sink / This one still pebble / Into a raging sea / Seeking / You /... Will it find you?” (26). The raging sea is the wounded water, a simile for her soul wounded because it is loveless.

The poetic voice evokes, among other emotions, her ecstasy in love along with her fear of the void: “White smoke / Ascended / From our two clasped bodies” (41). But love is a phantom, a “phantom limb” that hounds her day and night, in the poem “The Phantom Limb”: “We were / Two / But just / One / Night / To cover us. / ... / You / Are this pain, / This phantom limb / Of love, / That suddenly starts aching” (96).

Death, the ultimate separation, causes trauma. Torres creates a discourse of mourning and desolation, silence, and tears caused by death. The sorrowful memory of poet María Mercedes Carranza's suicide reappears in the night in the poem "And Silence Slips Like Soap" (78). "My memory switches you on / And seeing you appear / I tell myself: / Don't ever say / You will never write from this water" (78). The terrifying thought that suicide may be plausible is distressful. Desolate, a woman mourns the death of her husband, and the poet witnesses her sorrow, in the poem "Prima Donna" (94): "I watch a rock cry inward / I watch a prima donna / Carry her primal pain. / ... / The afternoon she spent / Anchored on board / Scouting the horizon / Alone / Since he fell dead" (94). The gifted Dutch photographer Dirk de Herder (1914-2003) has died, and the poet confesses her religious misgivings in the poem "Closing Up Shop" (72): "Hard to believe in God / Yet I believe / Some magic beings / Like you / Don't die: / They just run out / And play / And step into the light" (72). Immortality is achieved in art.

In the narrative poem, "Miriam's tears" (119), there is a long-distance phone call from Medellín, and Miriam answers in Bangkok, "And ipso facto / Miriam began lugging her tears", and "One by one she started placing them in the jewelry case / Her mother bought her at *San Andresito*". Then Miriam travels home accompanied by her tears: "Bangkok, Amsterdam, Madrid. / Bogotá. / Medellín. / During the long, long journey / Across her father's death / Miriam carried her case, / chockfull of tears / Seven days with their nights / Through offices and airports." Fortunately "Tears don't set off alarms / At metal checkpoints. / They are invisible under X-rays. / She had no trouble getting them past customs". Miriam and her jewel box full of tears reach their destination and an explosion of tears shared with her mother brings the cathartic element to release the trauma of death: "The little pearls fell out and spilled on the table and floor" (120). As tears turn into pearls and pain turns into words, the poem takes the form of a magical rapture that heals and reconciles.

Death, destruction, and decay are themes associated with war, terrorism, and corruption in these traumatic times in Europe and the world. In *Wounded Water*, a soldier writes a page in his diary where he describes the death of a fellow soldier who commits suicide in order to escape "the carnage of war that surrounded him" ("From the Diary of a Conscripted Soldier" 74). Children look at fireworks at a summer festival in Geneva, in the poem "Fireworks Display" (100), but the poet evokes other fires and other children, the children of war filled with terror in their hearts: "Wrapped in the arms of loved ones, / Clinging to their necks, shivering, / Screaming, / The children of war / can have no fond memories of / Things that go bump in the night" (100). A young girl blows bubbles while standing in the street. She has joined the march in protest for

the Madrid bombings on March 11th: “She’s a beautiful young girl / And ours a savage / World / That reduces her dreams / And her Friday, finally free from classes / To being here, tonight, / Perched on a metal fence with just soap bubbles, / Life flakes, tears, rage and love / To strike back / At the onslaught of death that struck Madrid” (184). Solidarity is a positive answer to the trauma of our times. In the poem “A Human Chain Crosses a Demonstration” (180), as the poet takes part in a demonstration at Plaza Cataluña, in Barcelona, she reflects: “How comforting I find it / To watch this human chain walking past me” (180).

A cluster of poems in *Wounded Water* are self-referential. The poet speaks of New Poems (102) as fragile and delicate: “Like preemies / Under their tents / A whiff of fresh air, / A gust / Of wind / Might collapse them” (102). The struggle to find the precise word, the proper rhythm becomes a game, a playful experience, or a hazardous one, like the games of life: “The word sits here / Upon my lap and just under my feet, / Above my head it leaps and stares at me inquiringly / Waiting and wondering what I shall call it” (88). The poet’s self-reflective poetry reveals her inner struggles to transform challenges into opportunities. It is a means to regain order and control. Life and poetry are interlaced. In her final analysis, as expressed in “Testament” (188), the book’s last poem, Torres has come to terms with herself and her life: “I was not right. I was not / Wrong / I was the only way / I could be / Given my joys and limitations” (188). Gregory Orr explains the effect of the creative process in coping with trauma:

But in the act of making a poem at least two crucial things have taken place, which are different than ordinary life. First, we have shifted the crisis to a bearable distance from us: removed it to the symbolic but vivid world of language. Secondly, we have actively made and shaped this model of our situation rather than passively endured it as lived experience. (4)

Anabel Torres has become an artist not immersed in a particular culture, but rather one that embraces the global village. In his article, “Remaking Passports”, art historian, Néstor García Canclini proposes that: “Identities are constituted not only in relation to unique territories, but in the multicultural intersections of objects, messages, and people coming from diverse directions” (188). Again, as a woman and as a poet, Torres is constructing an identity free from nostalgia and in transient towards new multicultural and multilingual worlds. The bilingual edition of her poetry is an indication of a desire for new ways of poetic expression as well as a yearning for new horizons.

To conclude, *Wounded Water* is poetry of trauma, survival, and affirmation through sweat and tears transformed into “loved water”. It is poetry of hope, love of life, renewal and purification, as in the poem “Environmentally Clean” (154), where the

recurring symbol of water cleanses and renews: “Suddenly rain washed the face of the world / And everything is now / So spick and span / I can’t make out even one speck of future: / Emptied, / Cleansed, / Ready to restart playing” (154). Thus, the poet continues her journey translating her daily crisis into poetic language.

Wounded Water offers a poetic encounter with the trauma of “the minute personal shocks” of her everyday existence. In *Wounded Water*, Torres reveals her own self in possession of a particular, personal and private world. She is a woman poet and her poetry is inhabited by the awareness of her womanhood. Her poetic universe displays «engagement, involvement, and commitment», which, according to John Wilcox, are distinctive features of a positive gynocentric vision: “it tends to get involved with concrete feelings, things, and people” (Wilcox 7). “Her poetry”, says Américo Ferrari, referring to *Wounded Water*, “is stripped of ornaments and lyrical excess. Her work is succinct, like the testimony of a witness” (back cover *Wounded Water*). Linda Lappin finds that *Wounded Water* emphasizes “Torres’s twofold strengths: “the terse, sensual lyric slightly tinged with the surreal and the short narrative characterized by irony and dry humour” (“The Poet disrobed and the Naked translator”). Finally, Marjorie Agosín indicates that reading *Wounded Water* one is “before one of the most original and stirring poets in this heartrending 21st Century” (back cover *Wounded Water*).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agosin, Marjorie. Back Cover. *Wounded Water / Agua herida*. Bogotá: Árbol de papel 2004. Print.
- Alstrum, James. "Generación del Golpe de dados" *Historia de la poesía colombiana*. Ed. María Mercedes Carranza. Bogotá: Ediciones Casa Silva, 1991. Print.
- Araújo, Helena. Back Cover. *Wounded Water / Agua herida*. Bogotá: Árbol de Papel 2004. Print.
- Birkerts, Sven. "Disaster Calls Poetry to Action: Auden's Verses Are Back at Work" *New York Observer* 1 October 2001. Print.
- Bracker, Christopher. *Magical Criticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. Print.
- García Canclini, Néstor. "Remaking Passports". *The Visual Cultural Reader*. Ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- Ferrari, Américo. Back Cover. *Wounded Water / Agua herida*. Bogotá: Árbol de papel 2004. Print.
- Himes, Andrew and Jan Butmann. *Voices in Wartime, Anthology*. Seattle: Whit Press, 2001. Print.
- Lappin, Linda. "The Poet Disrobed and the Naked Translator". Web. 10 May 2011. <http://www.pokkoli.com/book_corner.htm>.
- Lee, Cecilia Castro. "Lo existencial femenino: Eros y poesía en la obra de Anabel Torres". *Literatura y Diferencia: escritoras colombianas del Siglo xx*. Vol. II. Eds. María Mercedes Jaramillo, Betty Osorio de Negret y Ángela Robledo. Bogotá: Ediciones Uniandes, 1995. Print.
- Newmark, Kevin. "Traumatic Poetry; Charles Baudelaire and the Shock of Laughter". *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995. Print.
- Orr, Gregory. *Poetry as Survival*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002. Print.
- Torres, Anabel. *Poemas de la guerra*. Barcelona: Árbol de papel, 2000. Print.
- . *Wounded Water / Agua herida*. Bogotá: Árbol de papel, 2004. Print.
- Ulrich, Baer. *Remnants of Song: Trauma and the Experience of Modernity in Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005. Print.
- Uzandizaga, Helena. "Agua amada, agua herida: la poesía de Anabel Torres". Presentation of *Wounded Water* 2005. Albacete: Barcarola Review, 2006. Print.
- Wilcox, John. *Women Poets from Spain 1840-1990*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1997. Print.