

trafficking for the sex industry is increasing despite better international awareness. Purportedly this is a result of the AIDS scare causing men—many of whom are from countries in the North—to want to have unprotected sex with “pure” individuals, namely young girls and boys. The reported number of child prostitutes in Asia is about one million and rising, and the numbers are on the rise in Burkina Fasso, the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe. As well, sex networks have resulted in children being taken from their home countries to countries in Europe and the Middle East.

Source: *Kinesis*, December-January 1997

DEATH OF A POET

by Dalia Acosta

HAVANA—“I can’t stop thinking,” complained Dulce Maria Loynaz—regarded by Cubans as one of the greatest poets Cuba has produced—shortly before she died last May at the age of 94.

Toward the end of her life, she admitted that it was very difficult “to forget forgetfulness.” Stricken with liver cancer, and blind for several years, Dulce Maria still cherished the idea of writing a history of Vedado, the residential neighborhood which was founded in the year of her birth in 1902.

Loynaz’s works are considered the high point of postmodernist “intimism.” Through her novel *Jardin* she also pioneered “magic realism.” Loynaz was never interested in belonging to a stylistic school or a generation of poets.

She also wrote volumes of poetry: *Versos* (Verses, 1938),

Juegos de agua (Watergames, 1947), *Poemas sin nombre* (Untitled Poems, 1953), *Ultimos dias de una casa* (The Remaining Days of a House, 1958), *Poesias escogidas* (Selected Poems, 1984), and *Canto a la mujer esteril* (Sonnet for a Sterile Woman, 1987). Loynaz also wrote a memoir, *Un verano en Tenerife* (A Summer in Tenerife, 1959), and the novel, *Jardin* (Garden, 1951).

Cited for her precise use of Castillian Spanish, Dulce Maria was elected to the National Academy of Arts and Language in 1951. In 1959, she became a member of the Cuban Language Academy, and in 1968 was asked to join Spain’s Royal Academy. In 1992, she received the Cervantes Prize for literature.

Miguel Barnet, a Cuban novelist, poet and essayist, has written of Loynaz: “She is a woman who bequeathed the purest pages of Spanish literature to our continent, a woman in whom the diverse lineages of the fatherland converge—gunpowder, song, a woman in her garden.”

Baptized Maria Mercedes Loreto Juana Xaviera, Dulce Maria was the daughter of Enrique Loynaz del Castillo, a general in the wars of liberation waged by Cuba against colonial Spain at the end of the 19th century.

The Loynaz family tree—rich in noble Spaniards and huge fortunes—even includes a saint, San Martin de la Ascension de Loynaz, a Franciscan missionary martyred in Japan in the 16th century. Never wishing to live outside Cuba, the poet said, “There are three or four generations of Cubans behind me. I wasn’t born here by chance, as if my father were an itinerant in search of fortune, or my mother

descended from the blue by parachute.”

Dulce Maria and her three sisters never had much social life, although the family extended hospitality to the great literary figures who visited Cuba. Among these luminaries were Spain’s Juan Ramon Jimenez and Federico Garcia Lorca, and Gabriela Mistral from Chile.

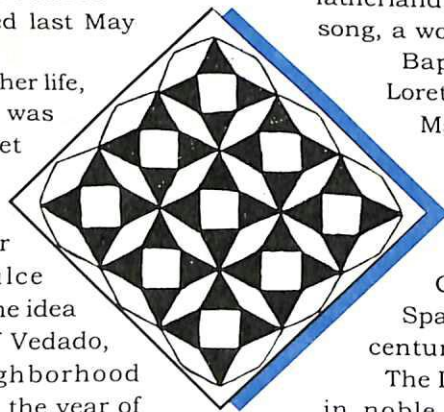
As a young woman, Loynaz wrote her first poetry in 1920, publishing her work in the daily paper *La Nacion*. She completed her doctorate in law in 1927, and subsequently became a journalist. She collaborated with the cofounders of *Origenes* (Origins), one of Cuba’s most important cultural magazines during the 1950s.

Her sisters also wrote poetry but never published their work, considering it irrelevant. Dulce Maria, on the other hand, slowly abandoned poetry in the 1960s, just as her work took a stylistic turn.

Growing conflict with her editors was only one side of the coin. The other was the death of almost all her family and friends, along with the transformations wrought by Fidel Castro’s revolutionary triumph in 1959. In 1993, Loynaz commented to journalist Mariana Ramirez-Corria that “Cuba was no longer a place for taffeta gowns. The country was no longer interested in poetry. More serious, less poetic themes had taken precedence. I didn’t stop writing, but my poetry came to an end.”

In spite of great prestige in Spain and Latin America, where her work was widely circulated and roundly praised, Loynaz preferred to maintain her home in Cuba since “it is the place which claims the author, and not the other way around.”

She wrote: “My Island, my Fragrant Island: Hold me always/



birth me always, unpeel my powers one by one./ Yet save for me the last, under a little sun-bleached sand.../and then to the edge of the Gulf where, each year, your mysterious nest of cyclonic force is born!"

The Cuban reevaluation of Loynaz' work began in 1987 when she won the National Prize for Literature. Dulce Maria's renown spread even more when a year later she was decorated with the Order of Felix Varela, First Class, the highest honor paid by Cuba to its intellectuals.

In 1992, Loynaz became the second woman—along with the Spaniard Maria Zambrano—ever awarded the Cervantes Prize. Only one other Cuban, Alejo Carpentier, had received this recognition—which is viewed as the Nobel Prize of Latin American literature.

Virgilio Pinera, another giant of Cuban literature, commented: "One never knows if this woman is awake or asleep."

Those who dared peep through her windows would see her every afternoon, seated in an old easy chair, delicate and fragile, dressed in white, seemingly—as Juan Ramon Jimenez described her—"midway between the gothic and the surreal."

Dulce Maria was delighted if a friend came to read to her, but if not, she sat in silence, motionless, thinking. She no longer wrote, not because she lacked ideas, but because she never learned to use a typewriter, and the thought of dictation drove her to despair.

Anticipating her death, Dulce Maria asked that she be buried in white—which she always wore in life—with the Cuban flag, lots of flowers and a band playing the "Invaders' Hymn," written by her father during the war against Spain.

Last year, Loynaz told visiting journalists: "I have set my whip aside. I no longer know how to crack it. However, I continue to offer the rose."

On her tomb, located in the family mausoleum in Havana's Colon Cemetery, is this inscription: "Here lies Dulce Maria Loynaz", and underneath, the simple words, "She lived."

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