

Daring to Write: Contemporary Narratives by Dominican Women

Erika M. Martínez, ed. University of Georgia Press, Athens, 2016, 240pp., \$26.95, ISBN: 978-0820349268 (paperback)

Numerous anthologies of Caribbean writers—and, more specifically, anthologies of Caribbean *women* writers—have been published in the last twenty years. *Border Crossings: A Trilingual Anthology of Caribbean Women Writers* (2011) and *Stories from Blue Latitudes: Caribbean Women Writers at Home and Abroad* (2005) represent two similarly curated anthologies that complement earlier volumes compiling the works of Caribbean and women writers. With the recent publication of *Daring to Write*, editor Erika M. Martínez focuses readers' attention on a specific, often neglected, subset of Caribbean women writers: Dominicans. Martínez intentionally places little-known works of newcomers alongside fiction and nonfiction written by established Dominican writers such as Nelly Rosario, author of *Song of the Water Saints*; renowned Dominican poet Rhina Espaillat; Ángela Hernández; and Jeanette Miller. Hernández and Miller, among others, write in Spanish, and the translations of their stories by Achy Obejas succeed in bringing their work to new audiences. The anthology unites in a single volume the voices of Dominican women writing both on and off the island and reflects the myriad diasporic communities in which Dominican women reside, whether temporarily or permanently.

The works of the more recognizable Dominican authors, however, do not dominate the anthology; instead, the collection weaves together twenty-five voices—both highly celebrated and little known. This blending of voices reflects in Martínez's decision to include various genres: prose essays, short fiction, and autobiographical texts are all represented in the anthology. The foreword by Julia Alvarez highlights the newcomers' contribution to the anthology, categorizing the voices as “fresh and engaging.” Alvarez

also speaks to the importance of diversity, not only in regard to the anthology's diversification of genre and theme, but also as a means to empower the hybrid ethnicity of Dominicans. Martínez, in the introduction, confronts the obstacles Dominican women writers face to have their voices heard. She addresses the difficulties she encountered while compiling and publishing an anthology focused on a specific subset of women writers—an anthology that challenges what is often considered a male-centered and uni-cultural literary canon that has largely neglected the small Caribbean country known as the Dominican Republic.

Daring to Write is organized into four thematic sections: "The People Who Love Me," "I'm Not from Here and I'm Not from There," "That's Not Me Anymore," and "The Countries Beyond." The first section centers on relationships, both amorous and familial, and begins with a nonfictional essay by Angie Cruz exploring her relationship with her father. This first piece sets the stage for themes that surface throughout the anthology, including identity, migration, family, coming of age, and gender. The following section, "I'm Not from Here and I'm Not from There," reflects writers' struggles with self-identification. Many of these pieces are centered on or highlight the dichotomies between islanders and *dominicanyorks* or Dominicans and Haitians. The third section of the anthology primarily confronts issues surrounding gender. Marivell Contreras' fiction, "The Queen of Chá," depicts a transvestite first-person narrator, and Ducle María Reyes Bonilla's autobiographical essay, "Pero, M'ija Where Did You Get *That* From?," shares a mother's difficulty accepting her daughter's lesbianism. The final section, "The Countries Beyond," confirms what appears palpable in the previous three sections: the Dominican female experience defies geography and extends well beyond the

island's shores. Thus, in spite of the anthology's four-section compartmentalization, the narratives from each section share common themes. Fictional pieces detailing Dominican immigrant experiences in Spain, like Riamny Méndez's "Saint Martha's Daughter in Madrid" and Yalitza Ferreras' "The Day's List," are paired alongside narratives exploring the experiences of Dominican women in other important diasporic communities, namely the United States. Juleyka Lantigua-Williams, for example, shares words of wisdom with other Latina professionals confirming Latina journalists should not feel burdened to cover Latino communities or to educate "mainstream" America about Latino communities ("On Being a (Latina) Journalist").

Aside from widening the readership of Dominican women writers by publishing previously untranslated narratives written in Spanish, *Daring to Write* should be commended for including various genres and emerging writers. The myriad themes represented in the twenty-five narratives relate to many disciplines, and the anthology promises to be an important contribution to Latino/a studies and women's studies. The publication of *Daring to Write* constitutes a "dare" in itself, as the anthology, for the first time, creates a space for contemporary Dominican women writers.

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