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Abstract

Review of Juanita Heredia. *Mapping South American Latina/o Literature in the United States: Interviews with Contemporary Writers*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2019. vii + 238 pp.

Keywords

South America, Latina/o Writers, multiethnic literature, hemispheric studies

Juanita Heredia. *Mapping South American Latina/o Literature in the United States: Interviews with Contemporary Writers*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2019. vii + 238 pp.

Mapping South American Latina/a Literature in the United States: Interviews with Contemporary Writers by Juanita Heredia is a welcome critical intervention in the growing field of multiethnic U.S. literature. Part of the *Literatures of the Americas* series, the book enriches the landscape of Latina/o writers by highlighting South American Latina/o writers in particular, a prolific group whose works have received critical acclaim, despite coming from a relatively small demographic, compared to Chicana, Mexican, and Caribbean writers. The book is divided into twelve chapters, each corresponding to one interview conducted by Heredia between 2013-2015. The interviewees were selected for their ties to South America either by birth, family relations, or both, and because South America remains a strong presence in their oeuvre in the United States in a variety of ways. Organized alphabetically, each interview is introduced by a short biography which illustrates that the authors are dispersed across the United States and that many either have successful careers as full-time writers, college professors, professional translators, and journalists.

As the title suggests, cartography operates as a central, multilayered, and cross-generational goal in the book, and, as a result, three main types of interconnected “maps” emerge: geographical, linguistic, and historical. Each writer reflects on the United States and their South American country, the role of urban centers, especially Lima and New York, and their relationship to those spaces. Marie Arana, Daniel Alarcón, Farid Matuk, and Patricia Engel reflect on geography, movement, and migration. These spatial movements elucidated for them the accumulation of wealth and capital that places like Lima once had and that now are associated with coastal U.S. cities. Similarly, language and the movement implied in the act of translation arise as a particular kind of map closely related to migration in several of the interviews. For instance, Daniel Alarcón, Mariana Romo Carmona, and Sergio Waisman discuss their roles as translators and their movement between languages and spaces whether for their family or as part of their profession. Julie Sophia Paegle, for example, speaks of the elusiveness of Spanish when she is not immersed in it, while Waisman talks about the task of self-translating his own memoir. In these conversations, it is possible to see multiple ways of moving in and out of language, of moving in and out of global cities.

The authors also reflect on their family history of migration as well as memory and generational differences. Farid Matuk discusses his grandparents’ migration from Syria to Peru, and, later, his family’s migration from Perú to California, and his own role as a parent. Carolina De Robertis explores her family’s conflicted memory of Uruguay’s Tupamaros while Jaime Manrique meditates on

his own Afro-Latin roots. By contrast, Mariana Romo Carmona's legal battle for the custody of her son and her work with Puerto Rican queer activist groups during the 1970s illustrate alliances beyond regional demarcations. The book weaves in other important maps such as literary influences, social justice activism, queer Latinx communities, and the recuperation of South American historical figures.

Many of the authors are interested in historical fiction, in particular, to understand South American figures from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Marie Arana's award-winning biography of Simón Bolívar and Jaime Manrique's blurring the lines between history and fiction in his historical novel about Manuela Sáenz, one of Bolívar's partners, speak to a desire to learn more and share with readers about well-known and nearly forgotten figures in the history of the region. Similarly, Farid Matuk recovers Martina Espinosa, a mid-nineteenth century Latina from Southern California, to reconstruct the erased cultural lineage and memory of Espinosa and others like her in light of the privilege bestowed upon certain bodies at certain times in history. For her part, Kathleen de Azevedo focuses on Carmen Miranda, the Hollywood icon of the 1950s, while Carolina De Robertis writes about Carlos Gardel, Afro-Argentines, and the Uruguayan and Argentinian disappeared. For De Robertis, historical fiction is a way to write oneself into a national legacy (70). These preoccupations highlight among these authors a proclivity to look back on history to understand the present.

The task of mapping also reveals that it is a continuous process. One caveat is how quickly maps can shift and how hard it can be to draw a stable equivalence between the mapped object and its abstract representation. This difficulty is best observed in the varied responses to the question of whether the authors identify as South American and, if so, in which contexts. The responses range from a strong identification with Latinidad and Pan-Latinidad to only in some instances. This variety clarifies the difficulty of trying to pin down, to map something as complex and ever-changing as identity due to a desire to impose a fixed sense of identity or label onto an individual. Confronted with this challenge, the interviews afford *Mapping South American Latina/o Literature* the capability of bringing together disparate voices without collapsing them under a single fixed identity category. In each conversation, Heredia deftly steers the authors' discussions of their different values, goals, and accomplishments based on each writer's lived experience. Each chapter thus contributes to the creation of a fluid map of South American Latina/o writers in the United States that accounts for the diversity within the group itself.

The volume is overall a much-needed contribution to the growing field of Latina/o literature in the United States. Heredia's book opens the door to further work on South American writers living in other latitudes, and working on other media which could include interviews with visual artists, comic artists, and perhaps even filmmakers. The interview as a methodological tool invites a closer look at these authors' literary production by learning about their life, work, and craft from

them first. In this regard, *Mapping* will be valuable to scholars of Latina/o and Latin American contemporary literature, queer and gender studies, and multi-ethnic U.S. literature; and a companion to students reading works by these twelve authors in undergraduate or graduate courses.

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