

DANCE BETWEEN

*Latino Caribbean Literature
Written in the United States*

TWO CULTURES



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PREFACE

Latino Caribbean writers born or raised in the United States are at the vanguard of a literary movement that has opened up a new field in literary history and criticism. The movement, both Hispanic and North American in character, is helping to bring the two cultural groups and their literature together. The body of literature produced gives meaning to postmodern and postcolonial concerns and expresses the aspirations, disillusion, and sense of acceptance and rejection felt by Puerto Rican Americans, Cuban Americans, and Dominican Americans. Writing sometimes in Spanish but mainly in English, they speak both to Latino and all North American readers.¹

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of Spanish American literature written in the United States. These Hispanic writers, born or educated in their countries of origin, left for economic or political reasons and took up residence in the United States. Authors such as Reinaldo Arenas (Cuba), Luis Rafael Sánchez (Puerto Rico), Luisa Valenzuela (Argentina), Laura Esquivel (Mexico), and Isabel Allende (Chile) write about their homelands. But as their stay in the United States becomes more permanent, the authors tend to incorporate a North American perspective into their works. Equally significant, they are also narrating their experiences in the United States and thus contributing to an existing body of Latino literature written by Chicanos such as Rudolfo Anaya and Gary Soto, Puerto Rican Americans such as Nicholasa Mohr and Tato Laviera, Cuban Americans such as Oscar Hijuelos and Cristina García, and Dominican Americans such as Franklin Gutiérrez and Julia Álvarez, who live and write in New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Newark, and other cities that have acquired a distinctly Latino character.²

Political events have helped to promote Latino Caribbean literature. During the turbulent decade of the sixties, organizations such as the Urban League, the National Council for the Advancement of Colored People NAACP, and the Black Panthers, as well as the Young Lords Party, drew attention to the plight of blacks, Hispanics, and Latinos in the United States. Latino Caribbean college students, many of them the sons and daughters of immigrants, were instrumental in creating and developing Latin American or Puerto Rican Studies programs throughout New York and other northeastern states. In search of an identity, they demanded rele-

vant courses about life in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and other Spanish-speaking countries and, equally important, about their own experiences in the United States. The newly created courses were different from traditional offerings insofar as they decentered the dominant perspective and incorporated an understanding of the lives of those being studied. The enthusiastic efforts of college students on U.S. campuses were paralleled by community activists and organizers who sponsored events to promote ethnic awareness and literary and artistic expressions emerging from the barrios and ghettos.

Latino Caribbean literature written in the United States has profited from the publicity received by the novel of the so-called *Boom* of Latin American literature, which during the 1960s brought Latin American literature to the attention of world readers.³ North Americans who read Latin American writers in translation have also uncovered works written in English by Latinos living in the United States. Like their Latin American counterparts, the works written by Latinos also refer to the Hispanic experience, *but within a familiar North American context*. Similarly, Latino works written in Spanish and those in English translated into Spanish have made the Hispanic American culture accessible to the Spanish-speaking world.

My definition of *Latino*, which reflects the lives of those born or raised in the United States, differs from the one used by other scholars and by politicians.⁴ Whereas the general tendency is to use the terms *Hispanic* and *Latino* interchangeably, I prefer to be more specific about the words' referentiality. *Latino* is a reappropriation of the nomenclature *Latin*, as in Latin American. The usage of Latin in the U.S. context is meant to distinguish those who reside in Latin America from those who live in the United States. But Latinos or Latinas growing up within the North American cultural context are unique because they have experienced a tension between the culture of their parents and that of the United States. Those raised in metropolitan areas such as New York, Chicago, Miami, and Los Angeles were subjugated by the dominant culture and political establishment. They, in turn, developed a culture of resistance and a language that mediates between their parents' identity and the culture of their present reality. Their sacrifice and effort to establish a distinct identity contributed to an awareness of the Hispanic community throughout the United States.

The definition I propose for *Latino* is different from the broader term *Hispanic*, which refers to those born or raised in their parents' country of origin. *Hispanic* in North America does not have the same meaning in Spain or Spanish America. In the United States it can refer to those who travel for political or economic reasons to the United States. For the most part, Hispanics are Spanish speakers, and English is their second language. Although North Americans may view them also as being Latinos, their

experiences in the United States are markedly different from those born or raised and educated in the Anglo-American environment. They, for example, have not been exposed to the same pressures as their U.S. counterparts. This is not to diminish the difficulties many Hispanic immigrants experience when traveling north, but to establish cultural referents that give Hispanics and Latinos meaning to their lives and experiences. It would be incongruous to group Hispanics from privileged families who have superior educational opportunities, traveling to the United States to pursue a post-secondary education, with Latinos living in the ghettos of East Harlem or East Los Angeles, attending inferior schools and lacking the economic, social, and political support necessary to overcome the limitations of their existence. Richard Rodríguez recognizes the difference between the two terms, and he was able to profit from opportunities others so desperately needed:

The policy of affirmative action, however, was never able to distinguish someone like me (a graduate student of English, ambitious for a college teaching career) from a slightly educated Mexican-American who lived in a barrio and worked as a menial laborer, never expecting a future improved. Worse, affirmative action made me the beneficiary of this condition.⁵

Hispanic and Latino Caribbean literature written in the United States can be studied by country of origin and genre, but more appropriately should be divided into two main categories. The first consists of works by writers who were raised and educated in their native countries and later emigrated or were forced to flee to the United States. While in the United States, they continued to write in the vernacular, mostly about themes pertaining to their island of provenance. Some traveled to the United States for brief periods; others stayed longer. Regardless of the reasons for going to the United States or length of time spent there, the writers' presence in the United States has had a lasting effect on their lives and works.

The second category includes Latino writers who were born or raised in the United States and who for the most part write in English. As a group, Latinos write an ethnic literature that responds to concerns about their isolation within a dominant culture that has denied them an identity and access to mainstream U.S. society. For these writers, their parents' country of birth is a distant memory. They compose a literature that searches for their own identity and origins in the United States.

Hispanic and Latino Caribbean literature written in the United States is receiving much deserved attention. However, it is not new. It began as a literature of exile that can be traced to the first half of the nineteenth century, when Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Dominican intellectuals, seeking

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political asylum from the Spanish colonial government, traveled to and resided mainly in the northeastern part of the United States. New York became the center of operation against Spanish dominion over the islands and emerged as an important intellectual and publishing center for Hispanic Caribbean authors. Newspapers and journals contain the political and literary aspirations of generations of intellectuals fighting for their countries' independence and include the works of figures like Cirilo Villaverde, Enrique Piñeyro, and José Martí, of Cuba; Ramón Emeterio Betances, Eugenio María de Hostos, Francisco Gonzalo (Pachín) Marín, and Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, of Puerto Rico; and Gens. Narciso López and Máximo Gómez, of the Dominican Republic.



The number of Hispanics traveling to the United States increased after the Spanish-Cuban-American War of 1898, into the first decades of the twentieth century. After the Foraker Law of 1900, which made Puerto Rico a territory of the United States, and in particular the Jones Act of 1917, which gave Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship, Puerto Ricans began to leave their native island to reside in New York City. Many of these immigrants joined their Cuban counterparts and worked as cigar makers. Later, after Operation Bootstrap went into effect during the 1940s and 1950s, Puerto Ricans migrated in greater numbers and were employed in New York's garment district.

The Puerto Ricans were soon joined by a large wave of Cubans, who were forced to leave their homeland shortly after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. This group of professionally trained middle-class exiles sought refuge in San Juan but also in Miami, Newark, and New York City. Cubans arrived in four migratory waves: first, from 1959 to 1962; second, from 1965 to 1972; third, in 1980, as a result of the Mariel boatlift; and fourth, from 1989 to 1994, as *balseros*.⁶ They added to a notable presence of Hispanics and Latinos in the United States, which continues to increase.

Dominicans are the newest members of a Caribbean population living in the United States. Their numbers rose as they began to leave their country concomitantly with the first two waves of Cubans, a period corresponding with the end of the Trujillo dictatorship in 1961 and the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965. But it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that the Dominicans became a noticeable presence in Latino communities. Like the Puerto Ricans, Dominicans fled their homeland to escape declining economic conditions.

Hispanics and Latinos living in the United States have indeed altered the cultural, racial, and linguistic complexion of North American society and are becoming a significant force to consider in this country's electoral campaigns. Demographers have shown that by the turn of the century, Latinos will be the largest minority in the United States.

1. Although Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Dominican communities make up most of the Latino population in the United States, people of Spanish descent have inhabited the North American continent since before the founding fathers transformed the British colony into an independent nation, living in territories that would later be incorporated into the growing United States. There were Spaniards living in the Southeast, on the peninsula that later became the state of Florida; and Mexicans in the Southwest, on land that encompassed the current states of Texas, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, and California, land recognized as Aztlán, originally settled by the Aztecs. It is not uncommon for government officials and North Americans in general to consider all Hispanics or Latinos, with Spanish surnames, to be the same, and there are important similarities among them. As a region, the Spanish Caribbean islands share many similarities in geography, climactic conditions, history, culture, religion, diet, music, language, and economy.⁷ However, their differences in development have led to varying political and economic conditions among these nations: Cuba as a Communist country, Puerto Rico as a colony of the United States, and the Dominican Republic as a struggling democracy.



When Hispanics migrate to the United States, native differences are reinforced and others are created. They speak a "foreign" language many do not understand, and because of barriers in communication and widespread attitudes toward foreigners, stereotypes are created, promoted, and generalized. Hispanics with limited access to the political, educational, and economic systems in their homelands believe that in the United States they can have freer vertical movement. Once they arrive, these immigrants find that they cannot achieve those goals without encountering unexpected obstacles. Those who grew up under privileged conditions in their country of origin are dismayed when in the United States they are treated in a manner that denies them the status to which they were accustomed. Moreover, the racial situation on the mainland makes Afro-Hispanics understand more clearly that discrimination exists in their country of origin; and the racial prejudice in the United States forces many Hispanics and Latinos to seek refuge in African American culture.



Historic events vary the experiences of Hispanics from the same country. For example, there are significant distinctions between Puerto Ricans who migrated to the mainland during the turn of the century and those who arrived in the 1940s; Cubans who fled Castro's island in the early stages of the revolution and Marielitos who arrived in 1980; and Dominicans who escaped the Dominican Republic before the downfall of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina and those who migrated after the U.S. occupation of the island in 1965. And just as there are differences between

Puerto Ricans living on the island and those residing on the mainland, there are noticeable ones between Cubans from Miami and those from New York. More likely than not, Cubans living in New York have more political common ground with Puerto Ricans and Dominicans living in the city than they do with their compatriots from Miami.

But for many Anglo-Americans, the differences are negligible. Hispanics, whether born in the United States or abroad, from privileged or low socioeconomic classes, economic or political exiles, black or white, are grouped into a single category and viewed as foreigners. Even in classical times, Pliny the Elder's study of the monstrous races reveals that the differences travelers encountered, whether real or imaginary, when venturing outside Europe tended to reinforce European culture and identity.⁸ In the postmodern and postcolonial period, travelers do not have to venture outside the United States; rather, travelers and foreigners occupy the same geographic setting. Separating Hispanics and Latinos from mainstream society is essential for preserving and reinforcing U.S. (European) national and racial identity. All Hispanics, whether living in crowded cities or in the suburbs, and blacks more so than whites, have been adversely affected by the dominant society. In some respects, they are treated as if they were members of Pliny the Elder's monstrous races. Regardless of the differences among them, Latinos share the same marginal experience in the United States, one that inevitably brings them together.

Generally speaking, Cubans have fared better than other Latino groups. As political refugees of a Communist regime, they have been welcomed with open arms. Cubans are exiles who may not return to their homeland, and an increasing number of them are putting the past behind them, accepting their destiny in the new environment. Their transition has been smoother. In comparison to other Latinos, white Cubans have reached a higher level of education. Puerto Ricans have fared the worst, in part because a large number of them are dark-skinned. Their situation is paradoxical. On the island, Puerto Ricans are subjected to a colonial status; on the mainland they do not escape a postcolonial condition, and they confront cultural and racial discrimination. Their double alienation, on the island and mainland, underscores Puerto Rican minority status and cultural identity.

Although it is true that some Latinos have made gains, the majority have not. Even those who have been able to transcend their parents' economic and educational situations continue to face cultural resistance from Anglo-Americans, who on the one hand demand homogeneity and conformity and on the other do not allow Hispanics to forget they are foreigners. Each of these attitudes is somewhat shortsighted. Latinos are ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse and can best understand both U.S. and Hispanic cultures and mediate the interrelationship of these two parts of

the world. The Hispanic presence in the United States serves as a barometer of tolerance or intolerance of North American society and culture.

As conveyed in the title of this study, Latinos and their culture are engaged in a metaphorical dance with Anglo-Americans and the dominant culture. The dance suggests a coming together of the two and influences the way they dance, to the same tune in the same dance hall. Though the dance refers to Latino and U.S. cultures, it is not restricted to one dance or one partner; on the contrary, it includes others, such as African Americans and their culture. Once the two partners engage in the dance, both will change; neither one will ever remain the same.

Latinos will ultimately influence all aspects of life and culture in the United States. This is already evident in entertainment, music, sports, literature, and politics, with such controversial issues as bilingual education, the English-only movement, affirmative action, and California's propositions 187 and 206. The influence is also evident in higher education, as more and more Latinos enter the university and, with African Americans, impact the traditional offerings.

Latino literature and culture have affected the way we perceive Latin American and American studies. The migratory and exile experience of Hispanics in the United States is related to the internal circumstances of each Latin American country and to U.S. attitudes toward it. With regard to the Caribbean, the long-standing interest the U.S. government has had in acquiring politically or economically one or more of the Caribbean islands has directed foreign policy. The U.S. government's desire to intervene in other countries has made the notion of borders more fluid, allowing people to migrate with relative ease. Likewise, the type of relationship the United States has with its neighbors to the south is not totally independent of the way Latinos are treated in the United States. In some respects, Latinos also influence how the general public and government officials perceive Latin America and provide a counterdiscourse on their countries' conditions.

American studies programs do not concentrate on all of the Americas, but rather the United States. Even so, Hispanics have lived in territories that were later incorporated into the United States, like Florida and states in the Southwest. U.S. studies do pertain to the study of the Americas insofar as the cultural, ethnic, and racial complexities of the New World are also represented in the lives of Latinos living in the United States. Hispanics have been from the beginning an integral part of U.S. history, but their presence is barely perceptible in the curricula of American studies programs.

Latinos also influence the direction of African American studies programs. The interrelationship between black Latinos and African Americans points to the black presence in the diaspora, leading to comparative studies



of slavery and race relations in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States. Racially speaking, countries such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Peru, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Mexico have a significant black population. Politically speaking, the issue of race and difference encompasses much more. It provides insight into history not from the victors' perspective, but from the victims'. And as more writers publish their works, literature departments, such as Romance languages, Spanish and Portuguese, English, and comparative literature, will adjust their course offerings. Equally important, a study of Latinos stimulates cross-disciplinary communication across colleges and universities, a requisite, according to François Lyotard, for a postmodern education.⁹

Latino literature will certainly figure prominently in postcolonial studies and have a shaping influence on past or present literary theories. Latinos living in the United States are subjected to a multilevel postcolonial existence. As a British colony the United States fought successfully for independence and has "written back" to the center. But this once peripheral country has also become a center.¹⁰ The United States is an imperial country in the traditional sense: Puerto Rico continues to be its colony; and in the modern sense: Latin American countries are affected by decisions made in Washington. Whereas Spanish America was a colony of Spain and also "wrote back" to the imperial center, the United States has replaced the Spanish presence and continues to have a say in the economic and political systems of the region. Latinos are caught in a double bind, between the imperial influences of the U.S. and Spain (represented by the cultural dominance of their parents' country of origin). Within the Latino context, postcolonial studies indicate the presence of the periphery in the center. Latino literature incorporates the dynamic relationship between the center and the periphery and, equally important, between the periphery and the center. This is most visible in the language in which some writers choose to write, which speaks simultaneously to their marginality and centrality.

The idea for this book emerged from an essay Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker commissioned from me on "Latin American (Hispanic Caribbean) Literature Written in the United States" for the *Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*.¹¹ As I read everything I could put my hands on, I began to uncover a wealth of material, of which I had some prior knowledge. I was born and raised in New York City, and my parents were part of the migratory experience that has contributed to Latino literature and culture in the United States. Educated during the sixties, I read the works of up-and-coming writers such as Víctor Hernández Cruz and Piri Thomas, which at that time were not part of the traditional school curriculum. As I began to receive formal training in the traditional areas of our profession, I put on hold my social, political, racial, and economic background, which at that time seemed incompatible with

postgraduate education. I specialized in Latin American literature, with a concentration in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Caribbean and Afro-Hispanic literatures. González Echevarría and Pupo-Walker's request allowed me to revisit my past and view it from critical and personal perspectives. Aspects of this study transported me back to my childhood on the Lower East Side and to memories of my junior high and high school friends. I reread my past experiences in such a manner that they served as an *intertext* for the works. I combined that viewpoint with my professional training to uncover a plurality of discourses contained in the lives of Latinos and present in their writings. Although I do recognize the sociological and political value of the works written by Latinos, as a literary critic I allow myself to be *guided* by the text. I have resisted imposing commonplace notions about Latinos on my readings, unless the text demands it of me. My methodology is not motivated from the outside. Rather, it is derived from the text and the text's context. I draw upon my knowledge of structuralism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism. The latter includes a dismantling of my own interpretations, a procedure I consider a fundamental proposition of postmodernism and which critics such as Lyotard do not consider. From a postmodern perspective, I do not see inconsistencies in combining the mentioned literary currents; on the contrary, they are all necessary in dismantling writing and the text.

I also draw upon the postcolonial debate. It is with Latinos that postcoloniality assumes another dimension, one that is relevant to U.S. criticism; the lives of Latinos gain significance, not within the colony, but within the colonizing country. In essence, both colony and colonizer, oppressor and oppressed share the same geographic time and space. Latino works provide a *counterdiscourse* to the discourse of power, one that questions and uncovers the strategies the dominant discourse masks as "truths."

The purpose of this study is not to provide a commentary on every Latino Caribbean author in the United States. Instead, I have chosen a representative number of writers whose works allow me to explore the lives of Latinos on the mainland and the literary traditions of which their works are a part. More often than not, literary critics study writers and movements after they have come to an end. Latino literature provides the distinct challenge of analyzing the movement as it unfolds. In this book, I study poetry and narrative. Rather than focus on one or two poets in each of the three sections, I have selected a variety of individual compositions published mainly, but not exclusively, in anthologies. As it is widely known, anthologies play a crucial role in the formation and promotion of the canon. There are already a representative number of anthologies in Spanish and English on Cuban Americans, Puerto Rican Americans, and Dominican American writers. I have concentrated on those works written

in English or which appear in bilingual editions. The anthologies were compiled to reach a Latino and North American public and speak eloquently to the presence of Latino culture in the United States. It is too early to talk about a Latino canon, but anthologies, and the present study, will pave the way. When the anthologized selections were deficient, I included material from the authors' own works.

In narrative I chose to analyze contemporary works that have come to the attention of the public: two from Puerto Rican Americans, two from Cuban Americans, and one from a Dominican American writer. As with my study of poetry, I have selected narratives written in English or which have been translated from Spanish into English.



There are only a handful of book-length studies on Latino Caribbean literature. For the most part, they concentrate on one aspect of this literature, either the Cuban, Dominican, or Puerto Rican. Eugene Mohr's *The Nuyorican Experience: Literature of the Puerto Rican Minority*¹² (1982), whose subject is Puerto Rican American literature, has the distinction of being the first on any of the three literatures. As the title suggests, he focuses exclusively on Nuyorican literature and provides a useful overview of important works, from Bernardo Vega to the present. Of more academic rigor is Juan Flores's *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* (1993), a collection of essays that considers Puerto Rican popular culture as resisting the pressures to assimilate into the dominant culture.¹³ The presence of Puerto Ricans in New York allows him to reinterpret island literature as well as understand the one that is unfolding in the city. Regarding Cuban American literature, Gustavo Pérez Firmat is the only critic of stature to treat the issues of that community. In *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (1994) he looks at the translational properties of Cuban American literature, popular music, and other aspects of culture.¹⁴ Pérez Firmat had begun to explore this idea in *The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature* (1989).¹⁵ If Flores privileges New York as the source for Nuyorican literature, Pérez Firmat does the same with Miami and Cuban American culture. Of a broader perspective is Ilán Stavans's *The Hispanic Condition: Reflections on Culture and Identity in America* (1995), which expands on Pérez Firmat's position.¹⁶ Stavans looks at Hispanic society as represented by Chicanos, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Central and South Americans, and he inserts himself into the same tradition. As a Mexican who identifies with Latino issues, Stavans gives the term a symbolic quality that goes beyond the parameters I have outlined. No full-length study on Dominican American literature exists.

I have found no study that gives a coherent overview of Latino Caribbean literature written in the United States. Although I do not consider myself to be a literary historian, I saw the need to fill a void in liter-

ary history. Therefore, in chapter 1, I provide an overview of Hispanic Caribbean and Latino literature and trace it from the early nineteenth century to the present. I discuss the reasons Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans migrated to the United States and important figures and works that have helped to define this literature.

In chapter 2 I study contemporary Puerto Rican American poetry, which has two separate but interrelated origins: one is literary and relates to William Carlos Williams; the other is more social and political and has been influenced by the Last Poets and the Young Lords Party. The poems focus on aspects of the Puerto Rican experience in the United States. Some deal with the individual reactions to a new environment; others are more political and social and address the oppressive conditions to which Puerto Rican Americans and other Latinos have been subjected. The latter compositions are charged with emotions, with anger and frustration directed against the dominant society that has denied the poetic voices an identity and the American dream.

In chapter 3 I focus on *Memorias de Barnardo Vega* (1977; *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega*, 1984) and Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets* (1967). Although these two works are not the most recent narratives written by Puerto Rican Americans, they are certainly the most important. Vega was the first writer to provide a historical understanding of the Puerto Rican presence in the United States. He supported the Hispanic community, but he also worked for Vito Marcantonio and was the national director of the Hispanic division of the committee to elect Henry Wallace. However, Vega died before publishing his memoirs; César Andreu Iglesias edited and published them twelve years later. I propose that Iglesias altered the manuscript and introduced changes that reflect the mediation and negotiation Puerto Ricans and other Latinos must endure when living in the United States. Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets* is already a classic among the works written by Puerto Rican American and Latino writers. Other Puerto Ricans had written about their experiences in the United States, but Thomas's narration was the first to come to the attention of a North American audience and opened the door for other writers and works. In his autobiographical account, Thomas describes the difficult and dangerous environment many Puerto Ricans and Latinos face and the racial and cultural conflicts he endured. In some respects, Thomas is a modern pícaro. Writing in the first person, Thomas describes traveling through different settings, constantly changing his identity, and attempts to convince the reader that he is a victim of his environment. Thomas's story is not only about his downfall and despair, but also about his rehabilitation and resurrection, as the act of writing itself indicates.

In chapter 4, I study several representative Cuban American poets. Although some of them look back with nostalgia to their parents' home-

land, others are willing to put the island's past behind them and concentrate on the Cuban American experience in the United States. The compositions of the Cuban American poets covered in this chapter suggest a marked difference between the female and male poets. Whereas the men tend to be tied to a familiar time and space, the women are ready to put the past and Hispanic male culture behind them. As we will see with some of the Puerto Rican American women writers, this is especially evident in the works of Cuban American poets who embraced the women's movement.

In chapter 5, I analyze two Cuban American narratives, Oscar Hijuelos's *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* (1989) and Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992). Hijuelos, who won the 1990 Pulitzer Prize, is the best-known Cuban American writer and already figures amongst the most popular contemporary North American authors. His work explores the development of Cuban music in the United States in the decades of the fifties, sixties, and seventies and in 1980. The novel pertains to music, love, and romance, but also to tragedy. The Castillo brothers achieve success and fame yet are still tied to the past, represented by Cuban and Hispanic cultures. García's novel takes place in the 1970s and concludes during the takeover of the Peruvian Embassy during the same year Hijuelos ends his novel, 1980. Whereas the Castillo brothers were trained musicians in Cuba, García's protagonist is an artist educated in the United States and is a product of the sixties. Typical of that generation, she rebels against society and her mother and embraces everything contrary to her mother's beliefs: she is close to her grandmother, who lives in Cuba and who supports the Castro government. The protagonist's trip to Cuba is a spiritual journey, to liberate her male cousin, and a reconciliation with her past and present.

In chapter 6 I discuss Dominican American poetry. Because Dominicans are the most recent immigrants, many feel more comfortable writing in their parents' language, even though their themes address the Dominican presence in the United States. Dominican authors are aware of the importance of reaching a broad audience and have produced several bilingual anthologies. Like Puerto Rican and Cuban American writers, they also suffer from an identity crisis. And like Cuban American writers, they look at their past and present from a contemporary North American perspective.

In chapter 7 I examine Julia Álvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991), a work that explores the issue of identity, which in one form or another is present in all Latino writings, represented by the different points of view the four sisters offer. As with other works, the protagonist needs to find communion with the past, though not the one defined by

current Dominican culture and politics. Rather, like other Latino writers, she looks for it in her childhood, which can never be recovered and only exists in the imagination—that is, in literature.

In chapter 8, I will explain in more detail the origin of the term *Latino* and provide a context for its use. I also will study Stavans's *The Hispanic Condition* and show the strategies he uses to redefine Latino identity.

As I conclude this book, I would like to thank first and foremost Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker, whose friendship and scholarly works have served as a constant source of inspiration. I am also deeply indebted to my Cuban mother, Petra Santos, who unfortunately passed away while I was writing the manuscript. I am grateful for her courage. As a single parent, she raised two sons in an inhospitable New York City environment. It was she who gave me the strength to stand up for what I believe is right.

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