LOOKING OUT, LOOKING IN

Anthology of Latino Poetry

Edited by William Luis

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For Tammie, Gabriel and Diego

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Latino Poetry and Distinctiveness

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I

Latino literature, written by authors of Spanish-speaking descent—living and writing in the United States—is experiencing a literary Boom. The increased population of Hispanics and Latinos has created a significant pool of writers with exceptional works. Readers, whether they are of Latino, Hispanic, European, African or Asian descent, are drawn to these writings and await anxiously to be mesmerized by the fascinating, intricate, and at times somber worlds writers place before them. Indeed, Latino literature has invaded the U.S. literature, culture and market place. This literary production already counts with two Pulitzer Prize winners, Oscar Hijuelos (1990) and Junot Díaz (2008), and Díaz was awarded a prestigious MacArthur Genius Fellowship for 2012. These and many others writers are recipients of countless literary awards. Some have already reached international notoriety, and their works have been translated into many world languages. Publishing houses, literary agents and academic journals are competing to claim their own writers. Undeniably, Latino literature is experiencing a Boom similar to the one seen with Latin American literature of the 1960s that bought to a world audience works such as Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). However, the Latino one is distinctive. It is written in Spanish but mainly in English and gathers different geographic spaces, time periods, cultures, languages, races, sex and gender orientations, and perspectives, therefore breaking with the binary structure common to many writers. Latino literature has already set the groundwork for becoming the literature of the twenty-first century.

Within Latino writings, poetry is a fundamental avenue for expressing the Latino experience. Latino poetry belongs to the tradition of Classical Western oral and written aesthetic expressions that can be traced to the dawn of civilization. From its inception and to the present, poetry provides insights into the different stages, periods, trends, moods and movements of cultures, associated with the classic, the baroque, the romantic, the realist, the modern or the postmodern period. In the early stages, Homer's *The Odyssey* described Ulysses' ten-year journey home to Ithaca after the fall of Troy, detailing his challenges with what many centuries later Pliny the Elder would classify as members of the Monstrous Races.

Critics have assessed this idiosyncratic form of communication equally as long as poets have composed poems. In Western culture, Plato was critical of poets. He did not value their contributions; on the contrary, he considered their societal role to be of no merit, and even excluded them, I would add unfairly, from the construction of his Republic. For him, philosophy was more valuable than an imitative art form. Aristotle also contemplated the significance of poetry. In the *Art of Poetry*, he addressed the issue of poets and their imaginative works, but paid particular attention to use of the meters, establishing important distinctions between the epic, the comic and the tragic forms, later known as epic poetry, lyric poetry and dramatic poetry; and to the latter he incorporated the comic and tragic as subgenres. Whether we side with one master critic or the other, each responded to the poetic concerns prevalent during the society in which he lived.

Latino poetry belongs to the tradition of Western and world cultures. In the contemporary period it represents the wants, desires, pain, struggles, violence, exile, migration, downfalls, births and rebirths, and successes of Latinos and their respective communities. Though the lives of Latinos are intrinsically tied to the culture of their parents' Spanish-speaking country of origin, they are also influenced by events unfolding in the adopted homeland of the United States, a space that for many has been transformed into a place of permanence. Gloria Anzaldúa refers to this space as a borderland/frontera, where different cultures come together, coexist, intermingle and convey new meaning and signification. Tato Laviera defines it as "nideaquinideallá" (neither from here nor there), thus suggesting that no place is also a location of identity.

There have been attempts to trace the origins of Latino literature to the early Spanish colonial period, and more specifically to a geographic space that would later become the southern or southwestern part of the United States. While this may be the case, Latino writing more aptly belongs to a literature that developed as the United States expanded its borders to

become a continental mainland. Latinos are an integral part of the United States, whether they were absorbed into what later became the growing and geographically expanding nation or for political or economic reasons migrated to the adopted country where many have lived for generations.

Latino literature in general and poetry in particular gains meaning as a narrative of resistance and cultural opposition within the context of the United States. Latino people are actively involved in creating cultural, linguistic, political, gender and racial spaces in which they are agents of their own writing process, which uniquely allows them to describe events not from a singular but a multilayered point of view. According to Luis Valdez's *Las dos caras del patrón*, Corky Gonzales' "I am Joaquín," and Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera*, it includes the voices of the oppressor but favors those of the oppressed. Certainly, these floating signifiers take into account factors such as parents' country of origin, time of migration or exile, place of residence in the United States, educational and economic status, race, gender, sexual orientation and class, among others. And the language of communication plays a fundamental role. Generally speaking, Hispanics traveling to or living in the United States, tend to foster the language and culture of their parent's country of origin. Those who were born or raised in the United States feel more comfortable in the language and culture of their adopted homeland, and they are mainly dominant English speakers. This is not to discount that there are families, communities or cities that foster the parents' language, and these authors are also bilingual. Most Latino authors write in English, some express themselves in Spanish and a few insist on using Spanglish or Caló.

The general tendency is to interchange the terms Hispanic and Latino, but there are discernable differences between the two. A more accurate representation takes into account their similarities, but also underscores their distinctions. Much of the present confusion is generated by bureaucrats and responds to how the U.S. government officials define race and Hispanics. Intentionally or not, government administrators, with little knowledge about the inner workings of culture, armed with their legislations, are producing or defining and redefining aspects of U.S. culture. For the consistency of record keeping and data presentation, the Office of Management and Budget Directive No. 14 mandates that the Census Bureau use four race categories—white, black, American Indian and Alaska Native, and Asian and Pacific Islander—and two ethnic categories: Hispanic and non-Hispanic. Combined, they produce eight ethnic-race categories. So, according to the Census Bureau Hispanics can be white, black, American Indian and Alaskan Native, and Asian and Pacific Islander. If we accept

these categorizations, most Hispanics are whites, fewer are blacks and an even smaller number are American Indian and Asian. Of course, the Census does not take into account the mixture that exists in many Spanish-speaking countries, how race is determined in the country of origin and impacts the statistical compilation, how some Hispanics and Latinos identify with African American culture, and how some even prefer to consider themselves more African Americans rather than Hispanic, perhaps knowing that some white Hispanics can also be racist. The census does not consider that some Hispanic Amerindians (or American Indians) do not speak Spanish, which for them is a foreign language imposed upon them by those who continue to speak the language and practice the culture of the imperial power, Spain, which subjugated their people. And if they are classified as non-Hispanic Amerindians, are we not erasing important distinctions between them and the Native American population of the United States?

In a society in which whites are more successful than blacks, it is much easier for blacks, mulattos or mestizos to pass for or even become "white" on paper. However, after the Black Power Movement of the decade of the sixties, many mulattos and mestizos, who supported the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, considered themselves black. The categories are not stable, and they fluctuate. As I mentioned, someone who is mulatto or mestizo in a Hispanic country can also be white in the United States. Or someone of the same racial mixture may be drawn to identifying himself as black. Finally, the Census Bureau does not make any distinction between Hispanics and Latinos, and assumes that Latinos will embrace the Hispanic terminology, when in fact Afro-Latinos are more inclined to seek refuge among African Americans. The Bureau neither takes into consideration the increasingly popular term Raza used by Latinos in the Southwest, which tends to be inclusive and provides unity to the many self-identified categories, such as Chicanos/as, gays, queers, lesbians of color, transgender, etc. The surveys favor Hispanics over Latinos, even though a large portion of the English-speaking Hispanic community prefers the term Latino. I remember as a child growing up in New York City, the operative classifications at that time were white, black (probably negro) and Puerto Rican, as if the latter were also a race. I never knew how to identify myself since I was black, white and spoke Spanish but was not Puerto Rican, though I identified with Puerto Rican culture and politics. And where would I situate my Chinese heritage? Should I have ignored it? Administrators, who do not have a clear sense of how culture develops, impose a particular and narrow understanding of culture on the rest of the population. For indeed Latino culture and identity are not singular but plural.

The Hispanic print culture in the United States of the nineteenth century provides important clues. Exiles seeking freedom in the Untied States wrote back to their home country to combat the ideology of the governing power, but also responded to the needs of the Cuban community in the adopted homeland. This was the case with Félix Varela's *El Habanero*, published in Philadelphia (1824-1826), which supported Cuban independence from Spain, and circulated clandestinely in the island. Valera and *El Habanero* were not an isolated event; there was also *El Mensajero Semanal* and *El Mercurio de Nueva York*, both published in New York in 1828. Indeed, New York became a center for the development of exile print media that attempted to influence the political discourse both home and abroad. In Cuba, Cirilo Villaverde contributed to New York's *La Verdad* (1848-185?), which promoted U.S. annexation of Cuba. In exile in the United States, he and Manuel Antonio Marino published the bilingual *El Independiente: Órgano de la Democracia Cubana* in New Orleans; Villaverde also wrote anonymously for New York's *La Voz de la América: Órgano Político de las Repúblicas Hispano-americanas y de las Antillas Españolas* (1865-1867), *La Ilustración American* (1866-1870) and *El Espejo* (1873-1893), as well as others from cities like New Orleans, Tampa and Philadelphia, all expressing a perspective censored by the Spanish Courts in Cuba and Puerto Rico.

Not all Cubans in exile shared the same goals. While *La Verdad* supported the U.S. purchase of Cuba and expeditions into countries south of the U.S. border, *El Mulato* (1854-?), founded by Carlos de Colins, Lorenzo Alló and Juan Clemente Zenea, proposed independence with the emancipation of slaves. It is ironic, as Nicolás Kanellos points out, that the editorial exchanges between the two papers questioned whether freedom could be obtained in a country that denies liberty to all. *La Voz de América*, under the direction of Cuban Juan Manuel Macías and Puerto Rican José Bassora, promoted a united front that gathered all the various political positions: the slave holder, the freedman and the slave, and encouraged them to fight the Spanish colonial power.

Hispanics in the United States use a national term and a broader one as a way of addressing a community with a common language and similar cultures, in a country that has resisted their integration into mainstream society. This position is peculiar since Hispanics, like Mexicans, Cubans and Puerto Ricans, have been a part of U.S. history, politics and culture since the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the United States acquired Florida, occupied Cuba, Puerto Rico, Texas and the southwestern part of the expanding nation state. In the early U.S. Spanish-speaking publications, writers desiring to address more than a singular national identity, considered

Hispano an appropriate term to bring together groups that sought common linguistic, political and cultural links with other Spanish-speaking nationals. The Cuban José Martí envisioned the concept of *Nuestra América* as an oppositional space within his country of residence. Martí was a member of the club Las Dos Antillas (1892-1898), a political organization whose objective was to liberate both Cuba and Puerto Rico from Spain. This was the same club to which the Afro-Puerto Rican Arturo Alfonso Schomberg belonged. Martí and the Puerto Rican Arturo Pachín Marín were members of the Cuban Liberation Army. They resided in the United States and both met untimely deaths fighting to free Cuba from the Spanish Crown.

A perfunctory reading of Kanellos and Martell's *Hispanic Periodicals in the United States, Origins to 1960: A Brief History and Comprehensive Bibliography* shows that of the more than 1,700 records contained in the book, the most common identity is one that addresses a particular nationality, whether it is Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Chilean or other. However, the preferred nomenclature when referring to *Hispanos* (Hispanics) in the early publications in Spanish is Hispano-Americano (Spanish American) or Hispano-América (Spanish America), used in newspapers like *El Correo Hispano-Americano* (1868) of New York; *Hispano-América* (1917-1934) of San Francisco; *El Hispano-Americano* (1893) of El Paso, Texas; *El Hispano-Americano* (1890-1920) of Las Vegas, New Mexico; *El Hispano-Americano* (1909-19uu) of Mora, New Mexico; *El Hispano-Americano* (1905-19uu) of Roy, New Mexico; *El Hispano-Americano* (1913) of Belen, New Mexico; *El Hispano-Americano* (1914-1937) of San Diego; and *El Hispano-Americano* (1891-1uuu) of Socorro, New Mexico. All were published in Spanish except for those in Mora, Roy and San Diego; they were released in Spanish and English. There is also *Cultura Hispánica* of New York (1926-19uu), listed as a Spanish-language monthly publication. In this and other variants, *Hispano* refers to the Spanish language and traditions, and Hispano Americano to those same customs present in Spanish or Hispanic America; and they were meant to address the needs of a Spanish-speaking population in the city of origin.

In the twentieth century the word Latino or Latin appears as a reference to Latin America but more appropriately to the journal *Latino-Americano* in Alice, Texas (1933-19uu); in El Paso, Texas (1891); in New Orleans (1930-19uu); and *Latinoamericano* in Phoenix (1934-19uu), all in Spanish-language publications. However, the term Latino is present in *La Gaceta* (1922-present) of Tampa, but here more as a reference to the languages derived from Latin, which is the case of Italian. Also *El Heraldo Latino* of New York (1923-19uu) promoted an international scope in Spanish with respect to *Latino América* (Latin America).

In recent years, the term Hispanic is used to classify an overwhelming number of people from Spanish America and the Caribbean moving north to their new home. However, these newly arrived immigrants or exiles do not consider themselves to be Hispanics. Rather, they are Cubans, Colombians, Venezuelans or Nicaraguans with their own distinct national identities. As new arrivals, they are bound to identify with their country of origin, though many U.S. citizens erase the new immigrant's national identity and classify them as Hispanics. With time, and awareness of the political, cultural, racial and economic conditions of Spanish-speakers in the United States, these foreign nationals tend to accept a Hispanic identity. Under Ramón La Villa, the New York weekly publication *Gráfico* (1927) publicized injustices committed against Hispanics and was subtitled "*Semanario defensor de la Raza Hispana*" (weekly defender of the Hispanic race); under Adolfo Rodrígues, it was known as "*Defensa de la Colonia Hispano Americana*" (defense of the Hispanic-American community); and under Bernardo Vega, it was subtitled "*Semanario Defensor de la Raza*" (weekly defender of the race), which recalls the original subtitle but dropped the word *Hispana* to highlight the concept of race. Schomburg, Evelio Grillo and Piri Thomas, among other dark-skinned Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans and Hispanics like Panamanians, also identify with African Americans and their culture.

All Hispanics have been grouped into the same category because they speak the same Spanish language, but there may be other reasons as well. Since there are many different countries in Spanish America, for a U.S. citizen who insists on an insular vision of the nation, it is easier to classify all Spanish-speaking "foreigners" as Hispanics, rather than to distinguish between each national identity, something that school children in Spain or Latin America learn early in school. Yet there may be other reasons. Someone from Europe is identified by his national origin, French, German, Russian, etcetera. But Hispanic becomes a catchall word that erases difference and is used to identify Spanish-speaking foreigners or immigrants, even though many are citizens of the United States. This type of classification also fosters an insular U.S. identity. A problem arises when Spanish- and English-speakers use the same word but with different meanings and partake in the same conversation; oftentimes the speaker uses the term within a particular frame of reference and the listener interprets the same word, which is also spelled the same way in the other language, but understands it in different cultural and historic contexts. Both use the word correctly but contextualize it differently.

As a U.S. term in English, Latino is of recent usage. As I have argued elsewhere, prior to its presence in the decade of the sixties, Latin was another popular word employed to identify people of Spanish or Spanish-

American heritage, but it did not pertain to people of Portuguese, French or Italian descent, as the language Latin would denote in Spanish and English. For example, Latin (as in Latin Jazz or Latin Tinge or Latin Thing) was used to refer to Latin or Caribbean sounds during the Big Band era in which many Hispanic or Latin (or Latino) musicians began to enter the mainstream.

Indeed, Latin (Cuban) sounds had become popular with the first recordings of RCA Victor and Columbia records, featuring the magical sounds of the Son, as performed by the Sexteto Habanero and the Septeto Ignacio Piñeiro. These were the sounds that the Cuban Liberation Army gathered from the eastern mountains of Cuba and played in Havana, as Miguel Matamoro's unforgettable "Son de la loma" ("Son of the mountain") describes so eloquently. Later, U.S. citizens traveling to Cuba after the Spanish-American War discovered the same melodies. Shortly thereafter, these and other musical compositions made their way onto the mainland, where they were welcomed by both Hispanic and mainstream audiences. Hispanic and Latin musicians in the United States popularized them. So, Moisés Simon's "El manisero" ("The Peanut Vendor"), Chano Pozo's "Manteca" ("Lard"), a contribution to Dizzy Gillepsie's band, Desi Arnarz performances on the *I Love Lucy Show*, Pérez Prado's Mambo, as well as Xaviour Cugart's music to Bing Crosby and Bob Hope movies, moved rapidly across the nations soundscape. But if these musicians responded to the Hispanic with Latin music, other musicians would justify the traditional use of the term Latin, when taking into account the music of Carmen Miranda, and composer Antonio Carlos Jobim, and other Brazilian musical traditions in vogue. Perhaps for this reason the Latin was also appropriated by Hispanics who felt more comfortable in their adopted homeland than in the culture of their parents' country of origin, in particular those living in the northeast.

In U.S. print culture, Latino does not appear until much later. After *El Amigo del Hogar* (Friend of the home, Indiana Harbor, 1925) ceased publication, it was republished some twenty-five years later as *The Latin Times* (1956), mainly as a newspaper for English readers, in support of the Mexican American and Puerto Rican communities of East Chicago. The transition between Latin and Latino is evident in Pedro Pietri's "Puerto Rican Obituary," about the deaths of Juan, Miguel, Milagros, Olga and Manuel. Toward the end of the poem, when referring to the positive aspects of Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican identity, the poetic voice exclaims:

> If only they
> had turned off the televisions
> If only they

had used the white supremacy bibles
for toilet paper purpose
and make their *latin* souls
the only religion of their race (emphasis added)

The poem was well known in the New York City of the sixties, many years before it was published in *Palante: The Young Lords Party*, in 1971. In subsequent editions of the poem, Pietri changed "latin" for "latino."

As I have also argued, Latino is also a Spanglish word; it is formed from the popular English word Latin. The word is borrowed from the English and pronounced in Spanish with a final "o" to produce the hybrid Latino, which coincides with the spelling of the Spanish *latino* (whose vowel sounds are much fuller) but is pronounced not with a Spanish but with an English intonation.

There was indeed a Hispanic or Latino community that was influenced by U.S. politics and culture. Some Mexican-American practices came to the attention of a mainstream audience with the Zoot Suiters, whose customs and traditions received underserved publicity during the Los Angeles riots of the 1940s. Many were discriminated against for adopting their own music, manners of speaking, dancing and dressing, characterized by their baggy clothing. The riots began with the Sleepy Lagoon incident of 1942, when the death of José Díaz was blamed on Hank Leyva and other innocent Mexican Americans identified as Pachucos, or gang members. The War Production Board banned the suits, which it deemed extravagant in times of rationing, and even unpatriotic. After the trial in which the Pachucos were found guilty, other incidents erupted between them and Military servicemen, who went on a rampage attacking Mexican Americans, but also African Americans and Filipinos. The police went on the attack, arresting as many as 600 Mexican Americans but no sailor or military personnel was detained. Eventually, the guilty charge was overturned, but the attacks on the Zoot Suiters spread to other cities like New York, Philadelphia and Detroit. In the *Labyrinth of Solitude*, Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz describes the Pachucos as outsiders of both Mexican and U.S. mainstream societies. For Paz, the visitor who traveled throughout the United States for two years, the Pachuco was a symbol of resistance and rejected access to white dominant culture. The Pachucos, who were kept at the margins of mainstream society, created a hybrid space for the expression of a new and different culture that also drew on both Mexican and American traditions. Other groups that followed pressed for their own culture and identity, and articulated a political position that supported their best interests. The most

prominent was the Chicano Movement of the 1960s, though Chicanas also demanded a space to recount their own Mexican-American experiences. In New York, the Young Lords Party supported the Puerto Rican and Latino communities of that metropolitan city.

For the purpose of the present anthology, Latino more aptly conveys in a generalized manner the experiences of people of Hispanic descent, who feel more comfortable interacting with the culture and language of their adopted homeland than that of the Hispanic one known to their parents; the latter one, I should add is not forgotten and continues to play an important role in their everyday lives. Many Latinos attempt to negotiate a hybrid identity or in betweenness that incorporates at least two cultures and more, especially if you take into account African American and Amerindian mores. And if we were guided by the definitions provided by the Census, they also include Hispanics and Latinos of Asian descent.

As U.S. terms, Hispanic and Latino became clearer to me when researching "Latino Caribbean Literature" for the *Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*, which became the groundwork for my *Dance Between Two Cultures*. With these and other studies, I observed a distinct difference between the literature of authors writing from their Spanish-speaking country of origin, authors writing in Spanish from abroad in the United States and authors writing in English from the United States. From the perspective of the literature I read, there was a close thematic and linguistic association between authors writing in Spanish, whether they lived in their country of origin or in the United States. This was certainly the case of Cubans living in the United States of the nineteenth century, who became foundational writers of Cuba's national literature, as was the case with the romantic poet José María Heredia, the novelist Cirilo Villaverde and the poet and essayist hero José Martí; all were authors who wrote about their country, Cuba, from the society of the country in which they resided, the United States. It is inconceivable to me how the context of the society can be dismissed from literary works, as many critics have done when considering them foundational writers of their own country's national literature. I continue to argue that it is indispensible to read the society from which they wrote as a necessary texture layer of their works. Be that as it may, this literature is distinct from those authors who feel more at home writing in English and incorporate topics about their parents' country of origin from a different linguistic referent. Jesús Colón's *Puerto Rican in New York and Other Stories*, Piri Thomas' *Down These Mean Streets* and Evelio Grillo's *Black Cuban, Black American: A Memoir* incorporate the U.S. cultural landscape into their writings. These Latinos are those born or raised and educated in the United States, and have had to negotiate the pres-

sures exerted on them by the culture of their adopted country, which has also become theirs. While there are Hispanic writers who incorporate the culture of the country of residence into their Spanish works, for Latino authors the mainland culture becomes an inherent characteristic of their works.

Some Hispanic and Latino similarities do not mean that all Hispanics and Latinos are alike. On the contrary, the differences are as important—and in some cases more important—than their similarities, even among those who come from the same country. For example, while some may argue that all Cubans are alike, there are noteworthy differences between Cubans who traveled to and live in United States before Castro's rise to power, and exiles fleeing the communist island. There are also important distinctions between those who left with the first wave of exiles (1959-1961) and those who sought freedom during the Mariel Boatlift (1980), and between the latter and rafters during the turn of the century. To be certain, many Cuban exiles leaving through a second country, such as Mexico or Spain, whether they stay or use it as a stepping-stone to enter the United States do not identify with the stereotypical Miami Cubans. There are even Miami Cubans who do not support other Miami Cubans, who favor the U.S. boycott of the island. This position became evident during the Elián González affair of 2000. Though some may be critical of the Castro government, they welcome a dialogue between the two neighboring countries. More likely than not, they may even be willing to return to the island and support the family they left behind.

Important distinctions are determined by the exile period but also by the city or place of residence, even when departing during the same period. There are dissimilarities between Cubans who reside in Miami and those who live in New York City or even Chicago or any other Midwestern or west coast cities. The early Miami Cubans maintain a fixed identity in opposition to the Castro government, some believing they would soon return to the island. However, those living in New York participate in a broader identity and community that include Cubans who lived in New York prior to the Revolution, but also other Hispanics, in their majority Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and African Americans.

Similarly, there are differences between Puerto Ricans who left the island after receiving citizenship in 1917 and peasants of modest means from the interior who departed after Operation Bootstrap in the late forties and early fifties, between them and the better educated and more affluent travelers, who enrolled in U.S. undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. And then, there are those Afro-Latinos who tend to identify with their national group but have also forged a strong link with the African American community.

There are differences between Mexican Americans who made their way north after the turn of the twentieth century and those who arrived during César Chávez's unionization of farm workers in the decade of the sixties and seventies, and between them and those Mexican Americans who live in states like New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado and trace their descendants to the time they lived in Mexico, that is before the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. There are differences between Chicanos living in Los Angeles, and those living in other cities across the U.S. borderland, like El Paso, between them and those living in rural communities, and other Central Americans residing in the same cities.

Though the term Latino refers to specific groups, it also defies any type of categorization, as I outlined in my essay for *The Other Latin@*, eds. Blas Falconer and Lorraine López. In "Latino Identity and the Desiring Machine," I apply the flows and interruptions proposed by Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* to the majority groups who compose the Latino experience: Chicanos, Cuban Americans, Dominican Americans and Mainland Puerto Ricans. But I also allude to other combinations that link the prominent groups to new ones, such as Guatemalans, Panamanians and Colombians to name a few, and the latter to even those who have little Hispanic or Latino ancestry or none at all, but who have tangential connections to Latinos. I am referring to non-Latinos who grew up in Latino neighborhoods, accept Latino culture or support Latino racial and gender politics. These "non-Latinos" are also Latinos, and they provide new and groundbreaking ways of imagining Latinos and the Latino experience. With time, Peruvians or Chileans and Spaniards, who become involved in political, economic, racial, gender and social issues in the culture of their adopted homeland, they can also become Latinos, just as Anglo Americans can, and anyone else, including Asians. Latinos defy a single categorization, and propose identity as multiple, for one can be Latino, Hispanic, Chicano/a, of European, African, Asian and Amerindian descent.

II*

Latino writers are at the forefront of a new literature that is transnational, transcultural, multilingual, multiracial and hemispheric, to mention a few categories that come to mind. The present anthology gathers contributions of Latino poets from the four largest Hispanic and Latino groups resid-

*Most but not all poems referenced in the introduction are included in the anthology.

ing in the United States: Chicanos/as, Cuban Americans, Dominican Americans and Mainland Puerto Ricans. I have chosen to highlight the historical and cultural contexts that reflect the lives of those whose continuous contributions can be traced from the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the United States moved westward and became a two ocean power, securing its borders with Mexico to the south, and to the Caribbean islands to the southeast, or to the Caribbean floating borderlands. History justifies this selection since these groups had become an integral part of the present definition of the United States. Though history is important, the selection builds on the past and focuses on the present. It provides a snapshot of what we can now proclaim to be a Latino literary Boom.

Hispanics and Latinos are a significant economic, political, cultural and linguistic group and are the largest "minority" in the United States. The United States has the second largest Spanish-speaking population in the world; it is more numerous than Spain, Argentina or Venezuela and is only second to Mexico. According to the 2010 Census, of the four mentioned groups, Mexican Americans make up 63% or 31.8 million of the Hispanic and Latino populations, while Puerto Ricans comprise 4.6%, Cubans 1.8% and Dominicans 1.4%. If I were to edit an anthology of poetry that reflects the percentages of Latinos, the reader would be presented with a work of mainly Chicano poetry, with some representation of other groups. However, there are significant Cuban American, Puerto Rican American and Dominican American writers, though Dominicans occupy the smallest section.

Language is indeed an important factor when assessing Latino poetry. Latino writers feel more at ease writing in English than in Spanish, but the second generation of Cuban American writers, or the 1.5 generation, as proposed by Gustavo Pérez Firmat's *Life on the Hyphen*—whose parents maintained Cuban culture alive, believing that they would soon return to the island—also write in Spanish. Spanish also becomes a medium of expression for Dominican writers who travel regularly to their parent's country and nurture their Spanish, and Chicana/os who frequently cross the U.S. Mexican border and/or live in the borderlands.

Other poets write about their shifting linguistic skills or competency, as they move from one culture and language referent to another, and have continued to do so many years after their arrival in the United States. Such is the case with Pat Mora's "Elena," when recognizing at the outset of her poem that "My Spanish isn't enough." She proceeds to explain how her Spanish once was sufficient, and how her children were fluent in Spanish when living in Mexico. But as high school students in the United States,

her children feel more at ease speaking English. These cultural and linguistic shifts isolate her from them and her drunken husband, who also wants the speaker to remain in her traditional place. Nevertheless, she continues to make the effort in the event her children need help. And she is successful since she writes her poem in English.

In preparing the anthology, I noted that "Elena," in its many Spanish and English manifestations, which include "Helena," is the most popular name used by Latino poets. In Franklin Gutiérrez's "Helena," the speaker observes an identity shift from the "Helena" of the Dominican Republic to "Helen" in the United States. If the first responded to the traditions of her culture of origin, the other one has forgotten her past, and has accepted an American boyfriend and way of life. The poem was written in Spanish and translated by Daisy Cocco De Filippis.

In "Bilingual Sestina," Julia Alvarez struggles with thinking in Spanish and writing in English:

> Gladys, Rosario, Altagracia—the sounds of Spanish
> wash over me like warm island waters as I say
> your soothing names: a child again learning the *nombres*
> of things you point to in the world before English
> turned *sol*, *tierra*, *cielo*, *luna* to vocabulary works—
> *sun*, *earth*, *sky*, *moon*. Language closed.

English is her dominant language, but it is insufficient to express Spanish words and ideas that do not mean the same in the adult culture. English sounds so mundane and ordinary in comparison to the melodic and beautiful images crafted by her childhood Spanish. The early names are associated with Gladys and the innocence of her childhood:

> Gladys, I summon you back by saying your *nombre*.
> Open up again the house of slated windows closed
> since childhood, where *palabras* left behind for English
> stand dusty and awkward in neglected Spanish.
> Rosario, muse of *el patio*, sing in me and through me say
> that world again, begin first with those first words

For Alvarez language is associated with that early, primordial stage, connected to Spanish, which she attempts to recapture as an adult and express in English, but with the same difficulty experienced by anyone attempting to uncover the past.