

## Book Review

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**Paulette A. Ramsay and Antonio D. Tillis, editors. 2018. *The Afro-Hispanic Reader and Anthology*. Kingston/Miami: Ian Randle Publishers.**

*The Afro-Hispanic Reader and Anthology* responds to the long-awaited creation of an up-to-date anthology of the literary production of Hispanophone writers who claim African ancestry. As the editors point out in their comprehensive and well-crafted *Introduction*: “The last four decades have witnessed growing interest among scholars and independent researchers in the area of Afro-Latin American Studies” (xv). In fact, starting in the early 1970s, we saw the publication of several seminal anthologies dedicated to Afro-Hispanic literature that focused primarily on poetry, including Rosa Valdés-Cruz’s pioneering *La poesía negroide en América* (1970) and Hortensia Ruiz del Vizo’s *Black Poetry of the Americas: A Bilingual Anthology* (1971). Other notable early collections were Enrique Noble’s *Literatura afro-hispanoamericana: poesía y prosa de ficción* (1972) and Stanley Cyrus’s exclusive dedication to the short story in *El cuento negrista sudamericano* (1973). These foundational anthologies composed during the early defining years of the field of Afro-Hispanic Studies facilitated and stimulated general interest and critical studies of African-descended Hispanic writers throughout the Americas. As this new field coincided with the establishment of Women’s Studies, Anne Venture Young edited the pivotal *The Image of Black Women in Twentieth-Century South American Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology* (1987) and Miriam DeCosta-Willis selected creative works and critical essays for *Daughters of the Diaspora: Afro-Hispanic Writers* (2003).

Before Paulette A. Ramsay and Antonio D. Tillis’s new, broadly inclusive *Reader*, however, the most recent efforts to publish comparative anthologies date back over twenty years ago to Ingrid Watson Miller’s *Afro-Hispanic Literature: Anthology of Hispanic Writers of African Ancestry* (1991) and Elba Doris Birmingham-Pokorny’s *English Anthology of Afro-Hispanic Writers of the Twentieth Century* (1995). Hence, the *Reader* fills an unfortunate lacuna in accessibility to key creative as well as analytical texts about the Americas, Caribbean, and Hispanophone Africa. In addition to literary texts in bilingual format by prominent as well as emerging writers, recognized scholars-editors Ramsay and Tillis have assembled a group of stellar cognoscenti of Afro-Hispanic literatures and cultures known for their

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incisive essays and groundbreaking research. Familiar with their work, I have named them the “Afro-Hispanist Millennials” for their fervent promotion of this area of scholarly exploration.

The *Reader* is divided into four sections composed of essays and creative pieces in Spanish and in English translation. Part I contains thirteen chapters (essays) that offer an overview of African elements in the cultures of Argentina, Cuba, Costa Rica, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. Most essays are endowed with an excerpt from the literary production of the writers highlighted in them. Part 2 houses the English translation of Part 1. Part 3 includes additional writings by the authors already introduced and featured, which adds to the genre variety of the texts, displays the versatility of the authors, and provides enhanced learning opportunities. All the material in Part 3 is translated in Part 4. This extraordinary endeavor to make original texts and criticism in Spanish available to Anglophone readers is to be applauded.

What makes this anthology a true “reader,” in the traditional sense of the term, is its purposeful focus on teaching. The editors intended to offer “a representative sample of prose, drama, and poetry for use at different levels in the classroom and, in particular, to enhance classroom teaching” (xvi). The *Reader* provides excellent guidance to those engaged in curricular design or interested in creating or expanding courses on African cultural elements in the Spanish-speaking world. Also, it implicitly indicates future directions classroom practitioners should take to fully integrate this vibrant corpus of Afro-Hispanic literature into the canon of Spanish-language and literature programs and world literature in English translation at all levels of instruction.

Provided by the editors at the end of each of the thirteen introductory essays are questions for discussion of the literary selections. Valuable explanatory notes provide further insight into the content of the readings, and essay bibliographies indicate sources for further research. The introductory essays are excellent stimuli for conversational practice or in-class writing exercises in English or Spanish. They further offer the content for many varied teacher-generated creative learning activities. The final pages of the anthology include carefully selected *Additional Readings* followed by the credentials of the editors and contributors who might be consulted for curriculum development projects in Afro-Hispanic Literatures and Cultures.

Any project of this magnitude (388 pp.), covering such vastly diverse areas of the world, is bound to receive praise for its inclusions and face disappointments about its exclusions and other perceived shortcomings. For example, there seems to be an unfortunate oversight at the end of Chapter 10, “Sancocho: Identidades afropanameñas” (79), where notes and references are missing for textual items that, in my opinion, should have been cited. Also, the essay features Panamanian author Carlos Guillermo Wilson (“Cubena”), who died in 2016, but this is not mentioned. Even if the essay predated his demise, this information should have been added.

As suggestions for future updates, revisions, and new editions, I recommend that the designation of “Bilingual” be prominently displayed on the cover, lest educators miss the opportunity to select this rich resource for courses in Spanish and on Hispanic cultures. To augment the pedagogical design, the discussion questions could be expanded, when appropriate, to cover the entire

section and not just the literary excerpts. Some of the translators in Part 4 are not authors of the essays, and they could be briefly introduced somewhere in the *Reader* to acknowledge the arduous task of doing literary translations.

Admitting some of my own bias for the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, even as I accept that not all areas with significant African-descended populations could be included in the *Reader*, I was hoping, nonetheless, to find a representative writer from Puerto Rico. I would have suggested the well-known Afro-Puerto Rican poet and novelist Mayra Santos-Febres. However, I congratulate the editors for incorporating Equatorial Guinea, often referred to as the only Sub-Saharan African country with Spanish as its official language. Overall, the *Reader* includes an excellent selection and critical analysis of representative writers from the countries chosen. I unhesitatingly recommend *The Afro-Hispanic Reader and Anthology* as an indispensable resource to enhance knowledge of the far-too-long neglected contributions of people of African descent to worldwide humanistic dialogues.