

Juan Pablo Rivera, *La hermosa carne: El cuerpo en la poesía puertorriqueña actual*.

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(Paper €26.00)

Juan Pablo Rivera's *La hermosa carne* centers the body in providing a timely alternative account of contemporary Puerto Rican poetry, eschewing the focus on generations and schools that has shaped so much of the critical conversation on the topic. While it touches on the work of a few poets of the Puerto Rican diaspora on the U.S. mainland, its emphasis is on poetry in Puerto Rico over the past three decades, which remains underappreciated internationally. The book is perhaps closest to Melanie Pérez Ortiz's *La revolución de las apetencias: El tráfico de muertos en la literatura puertorriqueña contemporánea* (2021) in its eccentric cartography of contemporary poetics in Puerto Rico and its focus on embodied difference (race, gender, sexuality, et cetera) beyond the nationalist frames that have so dominated Puerto Rican criticism.

The preface and introductory first chapter helpfully locate the book alongside the work of recent critics such as Áurea María Sotomayor. Rivera is historically and theoretically authoritative, even brilliantly framing his study around the gendered politics of the *Aguinaldo puertorriqueño* of 1843, a compendium of verse and prose that is foundational to the Puerto Rican literary canon. Chapter 2 is a reevaluation of the poetry of one of Puerto Rico's major writers, Mayra Santos-Febres, more widely known as a novelist and cultural worker but also a major poet in and beyond the Afro-Puerto Rican tradition. Rivera's wide-ranging reading avoids an essentializing politics of Blackness or womanhood by analyzing the depictions of the body in Santos-Febres's work in the context of her broader engagement with minoritarian identities and her exploration of the survival of precarious bodies, including in the aftermath of Hurricane María's devastation of Puerto Rico in 2017. Chapter 3 memorably begins by unpacking the problem of translating the term "queer" into Spanish, and it develops the word's untranslatability into a reading of how contemporary queer poets such as Carlos Vázquez Cruz decenter national identity through the body. Most memorable is the reading of the work of major poet Lilliana Ramos Collado as a queering of the Spanish mystical tradition.

Chapters 4 and 5 bring welcome attention to the critically neglected poetry of Julio César Pol through the frameworks of fat studies (to my knowledge, the first fat-studies reading of a Puerto Rican poet) and mental illness. Chapter 6 analyzes the poetry of Janette Becerra and Mayda Colón as working against the founding trope of the "house" of Puerto Rican letters famously critiqued by Juan Gelpí. Especially moving is the reading of the way Colón recasts the house as a symbol of those who left Puerto Rico as part of a recent diaspora

emerging against the backdrop of U.S. neoliberal austerity. In the work of poets such as the underappreciated Colón, Rivera finds a postapocalyptic tone and resigned affect but also, to paraphrase, a degree of optimism in the recognition of human frailty against the forces of nature. The final chapter focuses on one of Puerto Rico's best-known writers, Eduardo Lalo—like Santos-Febres, most recognized for his prose work. Lalo's famous interest in writing from, about, and beyond contemporary Puerto Rico through the trope of ruins becomes, for Rivera, part of a poetics of uselessness (*"inutilidad,"* from the title of one of Lalo's most memorable books) that extends into the crumbling of poetic form. Rivera highlights Lalo's status as a local writer with an international profile who writes from (and cultivates the persona of) an "inner" or "existential" exile within Puerto Rico. And he suggests how Lalo's poem "Necropolis" works as a meditation on the death of a certain dream of a unifying Puerto Rican politics, down to the poem's oddly fractured layout. (Rivera here dovetails with Pérez Ortiz's exploration of Puerto Rican literature from a necropolitical perspective.)

La hermosa carne's brief conclusion embodies the very *parpadeo* (act of blinking, flickering) it theorizes, recasting poetry as a flicker where image meets flesh. Given the territory it stakes out, I was surprised that its readings so often rely on traditional, formalist, U.S. critics and poets. (Without discounting the value of Rivera's skilled formalist readings, less Wallace Stevens and more woman-of-color/queer-of-color critique would have made sense for such a project, and more attention could have been given to the vernacular and performance dimensions of poets such as Colón.) Nonetheless, this is a smart and important book, as beautiful and fraught as the flesh it theorizes. It is a crucial reference and a welcome challenge for those of us trying to think critically and creatively about the horizons of contemporary Puerto Rican poetry, its politics, and its communities.

Urayoán Noel

Departments of English and Spanish & Portuguese, New York University,
New York NY, U.S.A.

urayoan@nyu.edu