

Interview with Anjanette Delgado
editor of
Home in Florida: Latinx Writers and the Literature of Uprootedness

When did you know that you wanted to create this anthology? How did you become interested in its theme, literature of uprootedness?

The theme of uprootedness is strongly tied to the stories I've been obsessed with my entire life: those of heartbreak that go beyond popular romantic contexts. What happens when we lose someone, some thing, some place, some dream?

Judith Ortíz Cofer says it best in the essay we include in this book in which she denounces the heartbreak of not belonging by saying:

“In Spanish, the symptoms sound like a religious litany: el duelo por la familia y los amigos, el duelo por la lengua, el duelo por la cultura, el duelo por la tierra, el duelo por el contacto con el grupo étnico, el duelo por los riesgos físicos, el duelo por la pérdida del proyecto migratorio, el duelo por no poder regresar.”

“Grief over the loss of family and friends, over the loss of the mother tongue, over the loss of culture; grief over the loss of the homeland, over the loss of contact with your ethnic group, over the fear of physical danger; grief over the loss of the original dream, and the grief of no possible return.”

What do you hope readers will enjoy most about the collection?

The enormous emotional range that powers the experience of reading this book, and that results from the inclusion of great writers whose uprootedness has just begun (relatively speaking), but also the inclusion of writers who are on the other side of the spectrum of belonging, might even have been born here, yet still feel this battle between where they are and where their roots still lay lie.

People who really liked *Ordinary Girls* by Jaquira Díaz, or *Infinite Country* by Patricia Engel, or anything by Richard Blanco, or books such as *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* by Oscar Hijuelos, should enjoy this book. Also, people who would like to read more from the best new Spanish-language writers but can't seem to find the works translated will enjoy new work from the likes of Carlos Pintado and Dainerys Machado. Machado was named among the 25 Writers Under 35 to Watch by *Granta Magazine* (Spanish Edition).

I also think this book would be invaluable to Latinx studies and literature professors wanting to find, in one book, works of recently published literature from the displaced, or as Reinaldo Arenas (whose work is also included in this book) would say, the uprooted.

What is one piece that continues to stay with you after putting the collection together?

The piece by Nilsa Ada Rivera, titled “I Write to Mami about Florida.” Nilsa Ada is a new talent, without a book to her name as of yet, who has had a very hard life. Her story represents the power of writing to save us, to guide us. It is proof to me that our mission in this world will not be denied. Jaquira Díaz's

piece speaks to me in the same way. Nilsa and Jaquira represent the opposite extremes of the spectrum of belonging and uprootedness that I have tried to include in the book.

What is one piece readers might be surprised to find in the book?

The short story by Reinaldo Arenas. It's a piece that has never before been anthologized after he published it, called "The Glass Tower." It's incredible in its humor, and also in the seriousness with which it approaches the point of view of a displaced writer just arrived to the Florida of the 80s, a decade that greatly shaped our state's modern identity.

When did you begin writing and what motivated that?

I wrote my first "novel" when I was ten years old. It had about 30 pages. Then I became afraid of life, and wrote only about other people, as a journalist. It wasn't until my mid-thirties that something (heartbreak) pushed me to write my first novel, *The Heartbreak Pill* (Simon and Schuster, 2008).

Do you have any writing rituals or favorite writing environments?

Yes, many. I write in pajamas. I write drinking coffee with coconut milk, and I write if the house is clean and everything is in its place, and I prefer to begin at dusk. I like to write when I'm not too sad or too happy. I like to write with my dogs close by.

But then there is revision. I like to revise in noisy cafes or at Books and Books. I still drink coffee, but I don't wear my pajamas outside (not frequently, anyway), and I like to start at noon when surrounded by people.

What is one place you recommend everyone visit in Florida?

There's Little Havana, a neighborhood in Miami that is being commoditized by corporate interests at a dizzying pace. If you don't visit it soon, you will miss what made it special.

Then there's the Museum of Fine Arts in Saint Petersburg. It has an incredible collection housed in a beautiful Florida building, and favorably compares to those of museums I've visited in New York, Los Angeles, and Europe. That said, I also make a point to visit an independent bookstore in whatever part of Florida I am visiting. No place is complete without that.

What are you working on next?

A novel set in Miami in 1998 and titled *The Hungers of Others* and a graphic novel based on my first novel, *The Heartbreak Pill*.

Is there a question you wish we would have asked you? If so, what is it?

Why am I editing a book about displacement when I am Puerto Rican and was born a citizen of the United States? Because Puerto Rico is a colony. It is also a country. Puerto Ricans are Puerto Ricans; they are not Americans just because they have a passport. Not really. Decolonization needs to happen, carefully, in order for Puerto Ricans to ever truly belong here, as they do on the island.