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## *El Bronx Remembered: A Novella and Other Stories* Nicholasa Mohr (1975)

In *El Bronx Remembered* NICHOLASA MOHR gathers together 11 short stories and a novella that take place after World War II, a period of great migration from Puerto Rico to the U.S. Northeast. As in other works by Mohr—such as *NILDA* (1973) and *In Nueva York* (1977)—the northeastern barrio, with its Latino and immigrant groups, is portrayed as a dynamic cultural space. Mohr explores the lives of Puerto Ricans who struggle to adjust to cultural clashes between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking groups as well as the poor conditions of concrete tenements. Mohr describes the sense of community among Puerto Ricans and the different strategies they develop to survive the problems of cultural adjustment and racial conflict. Each story allows the reader entry into the grim, harsh, yet thriving cityscape of the Bronx where there is racism and injustice, but where Puerto Rican families and neighbors enjoy a sense of familiarity and sometimes solidarity.

In one of the stories, “A Very Special Pet,” a Puerto Rican family keeps a live chicken in their house in order to have fresh eggs every day. The story presents the travails of these family members who have arrived in New York and find themselves in straitened circumstances. They keep dreaming of going back to the island, but the family situation gets worse, and Graciela, the mother, decides to sacrifice the chicken

to feed the children. However, the children, who consider Joncrofo a pet, convince her not to kill the chicken, and she finally tries to make it come to life again. For them the chicken has become a symbol of that heritage left behind, of those dreams about going back to Puerto Rico; killing the chicken would have meant killing their dreams. Meanwhile, “Shoes for Hector” tells the story of a young boy from a poor family who is given a pair of orange shoes for his graduation by his uncle. Though he is too embarrassed to wear them, ultimately he must because he has no other shoes. He hopes that nobody notices the orange shoes and after his graduation party he decides to spend gift money on a new pair of shoes to avoid any more mortifying situations.

In “Once Upon a Time” we learn about inner-city violence when two girls discover a young boy lying dead on a rooftop; he is the victim of gang violence.

But “Mr. Mendelson” is a more positive story about successful interethnic relations. Mohr describes the relationship between Mr. Mendelson, an old Jewish man living alone in a Bronx tenement, and the Suarez family. Mr. Mendelson spends every Sunday with the Suarez family until the day he is taken to a residential hotel. When members of the Suarez family come to visit him, a nurse thinks they are delivery people. The story reveals the friendship between the Jewish man and the Suarez family, who have become kin for him, thereby overcoming religious and ethnic difference.

The novella, *Herman and Alice*, tells the story of two people looking for love and understanding in a harsh social environment. Alice is a girl who gets pregnant and whose insensitive mother tells her to keep helping in the house since she is the oldest in the family. Her mother rejects her because her daughter has not been able to break the chain of unwanted pregnancies and a life of sacrifice. Alice has to help clean the house and take care of her brothers and sisters as always, and she feels tired and depressed. Alice falls in love with Herman, a middle-aged man who lives in the same apartment building and who helps her during her pregnancy, and they end up getting married. Eventually, however, they break up; Herman goes back to Puerto Rico, Alice returns to her old boyfriend, and she gets pregnant again. This is a story of characters trapped in their own familiar, though often destructive, patterns.

The promise of the island to give an individual a sense of home likewise surfaces in the story "Uncle Claudio." The clash between Puerto Rican and other cultures provokes Uncle Claudio's return to the island where he can "get respect." He cannot understand young people's behavior, and he "lives in another time" (139). Throughout this collection Mohr explores how Puerto Ricans adjust or fail to adjust to the Bronx, how they must take on a new identity to accommodate their new urban circumstances, and how they experience different gender expectations as well as ethnic conflicts. The distance between Puerto Ricans from the island and mainland Puerto Ricans becomes more visible through this collection of stories; Mohr invites readers to consider the challenges of migration to cold and sometimes hostile urban neighborhoods. In this regard her work contributes to the growing canon of PUERTO RICAN LITERATURE and anticipates the work of ESMERALDA SANTIAGO and other authors who deal with issues of acculturation.

The sense of realism in *El Bronx Remembered* creates a poignant portrait of Puerto Ricans living in the Bronx. Mohr's storytelling is accessible, especially to young readers, and she was finalist for the National Book Award for Children's Literature in 1976.

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Antonia Domínguez Miguela

*Empire of Dreams* Giannina Braschi (1988)  
Puerto Rican poet and novelist Giannina Braschi (1953– ) wrote *El imperio de los sueños* in 1988. Translated into English and published as *Empire of Dreams* in 1994, this collection of poetry centers on the lives of Puerto Ricans in New York. The book is divided into three parts: "Assault on Time," "Profane Comedy," and "The Intimate Diary of Solitude." "Assault on Time" tells us about loneliness, love, and the limited capacity of language to express human emotion; Belli writes "Behind the word is silence" (9). The next section, "The Profane Comedy," with its allusion to Dante, pays homage to the grotesque mode in all its exaggeration and dramatic potential. Finally, "The Intimate Diary of Solitude" features *The Death of Poetry* and *Rosaries at Dawn* and reflects on the speaker's identity and gender. The author assumes the personae, both male and female, of various figures, including Russian actress Berta Singerman.

Braschi uses a Chinese box structure to make the narrative both interconnected and complex; the texts reflect one another in one way or another. Thus, although the unity of the text as a whole is fragmentary, the repetition strengthens