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Review of Tu casa es mi casa, by Nylsa Martínez Morón

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Martínez Morón, Nylsa. *Tu casa es mi casa*. México: Conaculta; Mexicali: Instituto de Cultura de Baja California, 2008. 105 pp. ISBN 9789-6864-1863-7.

Tu casa es mi casa (2008) is Nylsa Martínez Morón's second collection of short stories, preceded by *Roads* (2007). Her work appears in several journals and anthologies and she has participated in literary workshops in Mexicali, Guadalajara, and Guanajuato. She was also part of the Creative Writing Workshop in the Department of Literary Studies at the University of Guadalajara. *Tu casa es mi casa* explores such themes as family, youth culture, language, and border culture. One of the most striking aspects of this collection, however, is the author's ability to create believable characters that are so varied—women, men, children, elderly, upper class, middle class, and working class. Despite the disparate nature of the main characters, Martínez Morón's emphasis on language never wavers. She is most successful in this endeavor in the stories that explore youth culture, enriching her character's dialogues with heavy doses of colloquial Spanish as well as words in English.

The second story in the collection is a clear example of the themes of youth culture and colloquial youth language as well as border culture. In "Y todo por la Zuly" the protagonist narrates his experiences with his friend, Nicolás, as they follow Nicolás' ex-girlfriend Zuly and then discover that she is somehow involved in the drug trade. After Zuly confronts them for following her, the protagonist and his friend argue over pictures of a hidden storage space and tunnel, supposedly leading to the United States: "Que no sé, pero ¿sabes qué estaría *cura*?" "¿Qué?" "No pues acá, imprimir las fotillos y mandarlas al periódico o al gobernador". "*Simón güey*, sobre todo porque no nos vio la Zuly". "¿*Tons* qué?". "Nada güey, borra esas chingaderas y ya" (26-27). This colloquial youth language is similar to that used by Poniatowska in her short story collection *Tlapalería*, for example in the story "Las pachecas": "Ay no, mana, a mí eso es lo peor que me podría pasar, que me dejaran aquí como pendeja pa' siempre" (Elena Poniatowska, *Tlapalería* [México: Ediciones Era, 2003] 25).

Language also plays a key role in "Infantilibros" and "Even in Christmas Time," both of which make generous use of words and phrases in English. "Infantilibros" is about a single mother and writer who challenges the precepts of the fairytale genre in her writing, just as Martínez Morón does in her own short story, which ends: "Matar al príncipe que no lo era" (49). In this story, the author refers to several 90s rock songs, including Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit," Aerosmith's "Cryin'," Smashing Pumpkins's "Tonight, Tonight," and Radiohead's "Creep." The references to American pop culture parallel her use of English—"peanut butter," "kechup," "cartoons," "playground," and "jedi"—and solidify her place as a border writer familiar with the cultures of both sides. "Even in Christmas Time" plays with a misreading of an advertising mailer: "We wash everything for you, just like mom at home, even in Christmas time, always for you: Manuel's Laundry Service" (68). This correct version appears at the end, after the elderly protagonist, Teodora, has experienced the shock of believing it is a message from her deceased husband Manuel: "*Olwis for yu, Manuel*" (65). The misreading of the words in the mailer leads Teodora to see secret messages in all of her junk mail and reminisce about her past love.

Family is another significant theme in *Tu casa es mi casa*. The title of the first story is "Familiares amorosos" and ironically plays on the idea that, at times, family is anything but loving. The protagonist, Aisha, and her brother, Gustavo, are still mourning the loss of their father when they suffer the loss of their mother, as well. There are obviously tensions between the siblings and their mother's family, which build when Gustavo arrives to his aunt's and uncle's house and finds that his mother has passed away when he feels they could have prevented it by calling an ambulance earlier. "Familiares amorosos" also highlights the theme of border culture, similar to "Infantilibros." The protagonists mention relatives who live in Indio,

Ontario, and Petaluma and who, after the death of her husband, tell the mother: “¡vas a tenerte que ir al otro lado!” (13). As with many residents of the border region, crossing back and forth and having relatives who have moved to “the other side” are commonplace.

Finally, Martínez Morón’s versatility is evident in the range of characters that appear in her stories, from young to old and well off to working class. In this collection, she is able to create an array of personalities and develop their corresponding linguistic traits. This attention to language, along with such themes as youth and border culture make *Tu casa es mi casa* an absorbing collection of short stories. Martínez Morón rightfully takes her place among the noteworthy authors of the U.S./Mexico border along with writers such as Rosina Conde.

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