Roberto Márquez, *The Poet's Prose and Other Essays: Race, National Identity, and Diaspora in the Americas*. New York: Peter Lang, 2019. xiv + 157 pp. (Cloth US\$92.95)

Roberto Márquez, Professor Emeritus of Latin American and Caribbean Studies at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, is definitively one of Puerto Rico's most outstanding intellectuals of the last half century. Raised in the Puerto Rican barrios of New York City, he is one of a very few of his generation, class, and skin color to have achieved an undergraduate degree from Brandeis and a PhD from Harvard. He was later awarded scholarships for further studies and research in Spain and Peru, visited many more Latin American countries, and came to be a truly international humanist. With a profound knowledge of both Spanish and English, studies in literature, and wide-ranging reading in history and social sciences, he became an extremely fine translator, especially of poetry, rendering difficult texts such as those of Nicolás Guillén from Spanish to English, and those of Derek Walcott and George Lamming from English to Spanish. He assembled a collection of the best of Puerto Rican poetry in an English-language anthology and is editor of the bilingual collection *Latin American Revolutionary Poetry*.

The phrase "the poet's prose" from the title of the book under review here refers to Guillén's essays, conferences, and newspaper articles. But it could also be applied to Márquez's own book. In the most comprehensive analysis of Guillén's prose that I have seen he shows how his nonfiction is consistent with his poetry in terms of sociopolitical practices and worldview. Márquez's analytical essays (of which this book is constituted) are also consistent with his gifts as a translator, not only in terms of themes and perspective, but also in the poetic fineness of his prose.

The Poet's Prose and Other Essays is divided into three sections. The first (somewhat more than half of the book) includes three long essays on the general theme of "Culture, Race, and National Identity": one on Peruvian thinker and political figure José Carlos Mariátegui, one on anthropologist Oscar Lewis's *La Vida*, and the essay on Guillén's prose. The first two of these examine the contributions and shortcomings of the writings in their historical and intellectual context. The combination of Georges Sorel's vitalism, Marxist class analysis, and the ethnic question comes together in his presentation of Mariátegui. But while Mariátegui defends the importance of indigenous groups in promoting a national Peruvian revolution, he underestimates and even undervalues the African legacy.

In *La Vida* (1966), Oscar Lewis used recorded interviews to reconstruct the life history of a Puerto Rican family of slum dwellers, trying to specify the char-

acteristics of what he termed “the culture of poverty.” Márquez rightfully criticizes Lewis’s loosely defined concepts and methods of representation, pointing out that a poor peasant can have very different experiences from a poor urban worker, and both from a poor lumpen, like the family of prostitutes that Lewis focused on. Nevertheless, Márquez finds value in the fact that all these life histories show the importance played by race at a time when “race” had not been given sufficient importance in studies of Puerto Rican national formation and intellectual history. Even though, unlike his previous research in Mexico, *La Vida* focuses on an all-women family, Lewis does not analyze the possible methodological problems in studies of gender, but Márquez fails to pinpoint this equally important shortcoming.

The second and third sections of *The Poet’s Prose* are a collection of much shorter but very incisive book reviews—seven gathered under the sectional rubric “Caribbeing” and four grouped under the heading “Of Diasporas and Latinidades.” Most of the essays examine groups of several books with interrelated themes. But even those that focus on one book are contextualized within wide intellectual currents. This last half of Márquez’s book can be seen as an intelligent journey through an ample analytical literature of the Caribbean and its diaspora in the United States, focusing mainly on the themes presented in the first half, that is, culture, race, and national identity. It constitutes a further and more encompassing contribution to those in his previous book of essays: *A World among These Islands: Essays on Literature, Race, and National Identity in Antillean America* (2010).

Angel G. Quintero-Rivera

Social Science Research Center, University of Puerto Rico,

San Juan, Puerto Rico

agquinterorivera@yahoo.com