

## CELEBRATING WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH 2020

# MY JOURNEY TO LATINA/X WRITERS

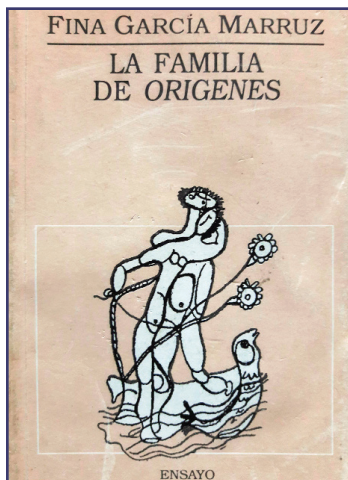
By Dr. Grisel Y. Acosta, Department of English

When I was asked by Edwin Román to write about Latina writers who inspire me, I was immediately excited about the opportunity because there are so many. However, having so many Latina writers to choose from turned out to be more of a problem than an inspiration. How could I possibly limit my choices to two or three? It would be like having to dance just one step of a favorite song, or only grade the work of one student in a class of brilliant creative writers, or only dip my toes in the Caribbean Sea when what I want is to fully submerge myself. Impossible! So what you will find here is an explanation of how I came to love so many Latina writers, a story that is not confined by a skewed adoration of a time when there were only a few writers out there, meaning we had to love those few writers because we had no other choices. No, instead, I focus on how I really came to understand the breadth of Latina writers that exist and how I found those who really spoke to me. What is most surprising is that Edwin actually began his request by mentioning one of the women who I refer to in my own work.

I met Fina García Marruz before I ever read a word of her poetry. I was 30 years old and visiting Cuba for the first time in my life. My mother is Cuban and trips were very rare because of the political situation between the United States and Cuba. My connection with my family there was through photographs and piles of soap, clothing, make-up, and aspirin that we saved to send to our relatives when my mom did travel to the island. Unfortunately, I did not have the privilege of ever traveling to Cuba when my grandparents were alive, so I never met my mother's parents, but when I did travel there, it was a marvelous trip. I visited Matanzas, which is an incredible Bohemian city filled with visual art, dance, and music. I visited my family in Caibarién, a very poor fishing town known for its delicious crabs. I quickly made a few friends there and one of them, when he found out I was a poet, took me on a literary tour of Cuba. When we traveled to Havana with my parents, he insisted on taking me to the house of one of Cuba's most important literary couples: Cintio Vitier and Fina García Marruz. I had no idea who they were. However, I remembered seeing Vitier awarded a medal on one of the Cuban TV channels, on in the background of my uncle's house in Caibarién. This visit

was clearly a privilege and an honor. I was very nervous to meet this important couple, and I expected their apartment to be quite different from the humble homes I had visited so far. I expected them to live in fancier quarters, perks from knowing Fidel and being his honorees. When we finally went to their apartment, I was shocked by what I saw.

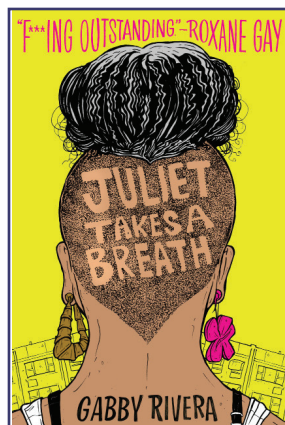
Vitier and García Marruz lived in an apartment that was smaller than the one I rented in Jersey City at the time. You had to use a bucket of water to force the toilet to flush properly. And they held no airs. Fina offered me a lemonade immediately and both she and her husband asked me questions and took my responses seriously. I thought to myself, if I met poets of this stature in the United States, I couldn't imagine being treated so well. The one luxury I did see in their home was their collection of books. Imagine an entire living room, which is really the whole of the apartment, reduced to 1/10 its size because library-style bookshelves take up the rest of the space. I had to be pulled away from the books in order to have a sit down with the two authors. There was something about the conversation—she seemed incredibly intelligent, as if she knew more than anyone else in the room and somehow had a way of sharing a hint of that without fully revealing her hand. I was impressed and wanted to know more. I knew after that experience, I had to read Fina's work.



Later, my friend shared some of their poetry with me. I did not connect with Vitier's work. I said to my friend, "Her work is better, you know." I don't think he agreed with me, but I was so convinced that when I wrote about my experience in Cuba, in a poem called "Que Quiero Gozar," I alluded to Fina being the better poet of the two. In the poem, "No, No, Memoria...", she laments the pain of memory which "doesn't support her defeated light," implying that she feels guilt about past mistakes. In "La Noble Havana," which would appear to be an ode to Havana, she actually subverts the form and questions the success of the city and its arrogance, implying that the city itself is unaware of its lack of introspection. Her surrealist poem, "Uno Vuelve a Subir las Escaleras," creates a fantastical home that is uncertain and haunting. It is work like this—decidedly different from some of the work that I was exposed to by other Latina authors as a child—that called to me.

I wanted the strange, the painful, the words that actually captured the bizarre feeling of what has happened to my ancestors, my people, via the conquest. I became a huge fan of García Marruz after reading her work and lamented I wasn't capable of talking to her about it when I met her.

A few years after meeting Fina, I earned the opportunity to be in a doctoral program that was shaped by mostly people of color, and there I was exposed to more Latina writers. I had been frustrated with the Latina writers I was exposed to in my youth, writers who wrote about girls who wanted to escape their Latinx worlds. I loved my Latinx neighborhood and dreamed of living there and keeping it Latinx forever! As I went through my Latinx studies and grew as a Latinx writer myself, I was exposed to writers like Angie Cruz, Soledad Caballero, Julia Alvarez, and Esmeralda Santiago, and through them I learned I wasn't the only one who felt that way. I had already been a huge fan of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Sandra Maria Esteves, and Julia de Burgos, but now I could see their influence on their peers and newer generations of writers. I learned about contemporary writers like Carmen Maria Machado, whose sci-fi stories are unparalleled; Gabby Rivera, whose work I adore teaching; Raquel Salas Rivera,



a non-binary poet whose dark humor and insight is fierce; and Raina J. León, poet and publisher of the *Acentos Review*. As an editor, I've had the opportunity to publish Latina writers like Analicia Sotelo, Nancy Mercado, Nova Gutierrez, Kristen Millares-Young,

Carmen Giménez Smith, and many more. I urge you to find your own path to Latina writers who speak to you. There are so many. It just thrills me to write that phrase: there are so *many* Latina writers.

**Dr. Acosta's latest book, *Latina Outsiders Remaking Latina Identity*, is an exploration of Latinas on the periphery of both Latina culture and mainstream culture in the United States.**

# CULTURA [CULTURE]

## RECIPES [RECETAS]

### Corn Fitters: Sorullitos de Maíz

#### INGREDIENTS

- 10 ounces of Corn Meal
- 1 tsp Salt
- 3 tbsp Sugar
- 1 tbsp Butter
- 2 cups Water
- 2 cups of Oil (for frying)



#### INSTRUCTIONS

- In a small saucepan, bring to a boil the water, salt, sugar and butter.
- Turn the heat down to low, add one cup of the corn meal and mix well with a whisk.
- Using a spatula, add the remaining corn meal until well incorporated. It should be very thick, dry enough for you to handle easily by hand. Add more corn meal if necessary.
- Let it cool down a bit before handling.
- Form the Sorullitos by scooping about three tablespoons, forming a ball first, then rolling on your hand into a stick about three inches long (7 cm).
- Heat the oil, and fry until they achieve a deep yellow color.
- Serve warm.

- JEANETTE DAVILA



**The Association of Latino Faculty and Staff**

## WELCOMES

**Dr. Lester Edgardo Sandres Rápalo**  
**BCC's new Provost and Vice President**  
**for Academic Affairs.**

**VISIT THE ASSOCIATION WEBSITE FOR MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION, LINKS, AND ARCHIVED ISSUES OF *BOLETÍN*.**

**<http://www.bcc.cuny.edu/campus-life/student-life/campus-diversity/association-of-latino-faculty-and-staff/>**



# NOTICIAS [NEWS]

## THE ASSOCIATION PROVIDES AID FOR PUERTO RICO

In late September 2017, Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico causing devastating damage.

The federal government failed to provide adequate assistance.

Puerto Rico was still reeling from this when it was hit with a series of earthquakes in January of 2020.

The BCC Association of Latino Faculty and Staff responded, just as they had after Hurricane Maria.

Association Chairperson, Leidy Pichardo, noted, "Over five thousand items have been donated. We collaborated with the whole campus community and outside organizations to support our families and friends in Puerto Rico."

Canned goods, rice, pasta, blankets, first aid kits, paper products, flashlights, bottles of water and other essentials that also included pet food were collected. Notably, nearly half of the donations came from the division of Student Success.

Members of the Association of Latino Faculty and Staff will personally take the donations to the people of Puerto Rico.



## BE THE MATCH



Vanessa Ibarra, of the Be the Match organization, conducted a presentation during the Association's March 3rd meeting.

Be the Match is the global leader in bone marrow transplantation. The organization conducts research to improve transplant outcomes and provides support and resources for patients.

Ibarra noted that a patient's ethnic background is important in predicting the likelihood of finding a match. Finding a match is significantly lower for African Americans, Asians and Latinos. Earlier in the semester, 150 BCC students were added to the registry.

Learn more at: <https://bethematch.org/>

## ASSOCIATION STUDENT MENTORING PROGRAM

The Association launched the Adelante Estudiantes student mentoring program with a Presidential grant. Students will be mentored by an Association member, as determined by their major or future career aspirations. They will also maintain journal entries of meetings with their mentor, which will be used for an ePortfolio presentation at the end of the semester.

Students will be required to:

- Meet with their mentor at least twice per month;
- Work with mentors to register for classes, stay on track with their schoolwork and/or additional resources as needed to persist in their education at BCC;
- Acquire and learn leadership skills necessary to enhance their academic career at BCC;
- Participate in all events, unless there is a special circumstance that prevents them from attending.

Adelante Estudiantes will enhance the emotional intelligence of students to ensure that they progress towards completion and graduation by receiving one to one mentoring.

### Program Assessment

Attendance and student reflections will be collected at each event. Students will also complete a survey at the end of each semester, which will measure lessons learned from the mentoring and workshop experiences.

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## **ASSOCIATION OF LATINO FACULTY AND STAFF**

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## **BOLETÍN**

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Editor-in-Chief

**JESSICA CABRERA**  
Culture Editor

**ALIXON DELGADO**  
Events Editor

# **EVENTOS [EVENTS]**

**EVENTS EDITOR, ALIXON DELGADO, HAD PREPARED A ROBUST LIST OF ON AND OFF CAMPUS EVENTS, BUT BECAUSE OF THE CLOSURES AND CANCELLATIONS DUE TO THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK WE HAVE DECIDED NOT TO LIST THEM AND PRESENT RESOURCES INSTEAD.**

### **Music Mondays**

Every Monday on the Association's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/BCCALFS>

# **RECURSOS [RESOURCES]**

### **- OFFICIAL WEBSITES -**

**CUNY Coronavirus:** <https://www.cuny.edu/coronavirus/>

**Bronx Community College Coronavirus:** <http://www.bcc.cuny.edu/covid-19/>

**New York State Department of Health:** <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/>

**New York City Department of Health:** <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/index.page>

**MTA:** <https://new.mta.info/>

### **- RECOMMENDED MEDIA -**

**The New York Times** has set up an on-line resource for all matters regarding Coronavirus. Please see more here: <https://www.nytimes.com/news-event/coronavirus>

**PBS News Hour** is the most cogent news broadcast during a crisis. Watch on-line here: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/>

**Also, follow them on Twitter at:** <https://twitter.com/NewsHour>  
**As well as on Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/newshour/>

### **- ARTICLES OF INTEREST -**

**Miller, Jen A. "How to Work From Home, If You've Never Done It Before." The New York Times. The New York Times, March 12, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/12/smarter-living/how-to-work-from-home-if-youve-never-done-it-before.html?searchResultPosition=2>.**

**Pinola, Melanie. "How to Work From Home Now That Your Boss Doesn't Want You Coming In." The New York Times. The New York Times, March 12, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/12/smarter-living/wirecutter/work-from-home-if-boss-doesnt-want-you-coming-in.html?searchResultPosition=1>.**

**Staff, Wirecutter. "How to Work From Home With Children." The New York Times. The New York Times, March 5, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/05/smarter-living/wirecutter/how-to-stay-sane-when-working-from-home-with-children.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>.**

**Nierenberg, Amelia. "How to Clean Your Phone to Help Protect Against Coronavirus." The New York Times. The New York Times, March 12, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/12/smarter-living/clean-your-phone.html?action=click&module=Spotlight&pgtype=Homepage>.**