



Sirena Selena vestida de pena (Spanish Edition)

By Mayra Santos-Febres

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According to Puerto Rican author Mayra Santos-Febres, theorist, poet, and award-winning writer, "for many years the Caribbean has been a desire factory for the rest of the World.[.]", thus her writing seeks to "include those issues considered exotic and reveal them as a different kind of knowledge: there is laughter, joy, a way of imagining desire and experiencing the body differently that is unique. There is where I place myself, because I do not want to be anything but Caribbean." The result is one of the most original and powerful voices in contemporary Latin American fiction. Not surprisingly her first novel explores the world of Puerto Rican drag queens. *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* ("Syren Selena, dressed in sorrow" might be a fair translation) tells the story of the title character -Sirena Selena- and his/her Puerto Rico drag queen cabaret-owner mentor -Miss Martha Divine- as they travel, glamour and all, to the still chaste Dominican Republic to present his/her bolero singing drag performance. The author imbues the main character with the enigma of seduction, both beautiful and monstrous, and what could be considered an opposition between Truth and Reality. Leocadio, formerly a drug addicted child -owner of an extraordinary bolero singing voice- has been rescued from the streets of Puerto Rico and transformed by his rescuer into Sirena Selena, the mesmerizing transvestite singer-entertainer, both characters setting their respective hopes in making a fortune to escape a haphazard life. To Martha Divine the child must "become who she really is", a Caribbean bolero singing drag queen, because the only way she will be able to harmonize his/her interior and exterior self is by being reborn as the diva Sirena Selena. Ironically truth and harmony stem from the bifurcated nature of a mythical figure -half human, half monster- unstoppable in its seduction. The tragic aspect arises from Sirena Selena's awareness that his/her attraction resides equally in the awesome perfection of her presence and in the knowledge that it is merely a performance, the dramatization of a gender identity that simultaneously is and is not essentially hers. The fluent and musical Spanish prose of *Sirena Selena* constitutes a rare reading pleasure on many different levels, including that of the casual reader who, like the audience in the cabaret, will succumb to the mysterious and seductive divas, as well as on a level of sharp literary critique that will find in the identity creating "protectress" a twin soul in the process of concealing desires under layers of quotes and counter-quotes. In this edition the foreword by prof. Debra A. Castillo discloses these clever

mechanisms, while her footnotes help readers to enjoy this intelligent and intrinsically poetic text.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Santos-Febres won the 1996 Juan Rulfo prize for her short story "Oso blanco" ("White Bear"), found in her collection, *El cuerpo correcto* (The Correct Body, R & R Editoras). This is the talented Puerto Rican writer's hilarious first novel about drag-queen life in the Caribbean. The novel's charismatic protagonist, Martha Divine, once made her living performing at fabulous international gay clubs with girlfriends who dressed up as Bianca Jagger and Margot Hemingway, among others. When she discovers a young, effeminate boy with the voice of an angel singing in the streets of San Juan, she immediately becomes his agent. Taking him to the Dominican Republic to perform at its most elegant hotel and giving him his first waxing from head to toe, she transforms him into the breathtaking and naughty Sirena Selena, capable of seducing the straightest of men. The novel, narrated by both Sirena and Martha, is written in the sassy and charming voice of a Caribbean diva, peppered with occasional Spanglish. It explores the nuanced layers of sexuality and the notion of how makeup and costumes can bring out one's hidden personalities. Recommended for a wide range of bookstores and all public and academic libraries. [The English translation, *Sirena Selena*, is available from Picador. Ed.] Adriana Lopez, "Criticas."

- Adriana Lopez, "Criticas"

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Language Notes

Text: Spanish

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kerri Goodman:

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Diane Walker:

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