

BEHAR

even longer if I had to include the countless examples of front office executives who condemned Beane anonymously to their friendly local columnists. . . . [Beane had simply] had the nerve to seize upon ideas rejected, or at least not taken too seriously, by his fellow Club members, and put them into practice. But I'd never thought of Beane as a genius. He was more like a gifted Wall Street trader with no talent for research."

One criticism lobbed at Beane and the A's organization has been that despite having maintained a consistently winning record since 1999, the team has yet to advance in the postseason. (The team clinched the American League West division title three times, in 2000, 2002, and 2003, and secured the American League Wildcard spot in 2001.) Beane told Keith H. Hammonds, "Getting to the play-offs isn't random: Over 162 [regular season] games, if you have the right team, the odds work out. But once you get to the postseason, everything becomes random. In a 5-game series, you can flip a coin five times, and you might come up tails five times. In our market and many others, we can't build a team that's specifically geared for 162 games and also for a 5-game play-off. That I don't think we'll ever overcome." Another criticism fired at Beane stems from the fact that once players become free agents and are available for contract arbitration, the A's cannot keep them because of their limited finances. This has resulted in an annual exodus of top talent, which year after year has forced Beane and his co-managers to come up with creative ways to fill the resulting gaps.

Coming into the 2005 season, the Athletics had amassed a 483-326 win-loss record over the past five seasons, second only to the New York Yankees, who had won 487 games and lost 319 over the same period. At the end of the 2004 season, the club had posted its sixth straight winning season, with 90 or more victories each year. In 2005 they placed second in their division, with 88 wins and 74 losses. During the eight seasons the A's have been under Beane's general management, the team has won more than half—644—of the games played (1,133), producing a ratio of .568. On April 1, 2005 Lewis Wolff, an owner of the Athletics, announced that he had extended Beane's contract with the team through the end of the 2012 season. The team's president, Michael Crowley, had his contract extended through 2008, and both men became part owners in the team, along with Wolff, his son, Keith, Steve Schott, and John Fisher.

Despite the criticisms that have been leveled against Beane, his approach to the game has consistently produced winning results. Oakland's ownership has shown confidence in Beane's management style, and many sportswriters are beginning to reassess his contributions to the game. Suggesting that Beane may be one of the few general managers who deserve to enter the Baseball Hall of Fame solely on those contributions, Rob Neyer argued in an article for ESPN.com, "It's pretty clear that Billy Beane is the most successful general

manager in the game today, based purely on what his teams have accomplished relative to their financial resources. In fact, Beane has been so successful that he makes other baseball executives nervous. He makes the Commissioner's Office nervous because he proves that competitive balance is about far more than just payrolls. And he makes other general managers nervous. How can they complain about not having enough money when that #@%\$ out in Oakland is winning division titles with less money than just about anybody?"

Beane and his wife, Tara, live in San Ramon, California. Their daughter, Casey, is in her early teens.

—C.M.

Suggested Reading: *baseball-reference.com*; *Fast Company* p84+ May 2003; *Michigan Law Review* p1390+ May 1, 2004; *MLB.com*; *Oakland Athletics* (on-line); *Pensions and Investments* p1+ Sep. 15, 2003; *Sports Illustrated* p66+ Mar. 1, 2004, p100 Apr. 4, 2005; *Sports Illustrated* (on-line) June 25, 2003



Courtesy of Ruth Behar

Behar, Ruth

(BAY-har)

Nov. 12, 1956—*Anthropologist; poet; filmmaker*

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After she won a MacArthur Fellowship, in 1988, and thereby firmly established herself as a scholar,

the anthropologist Ruth Behar began working with experimental forms of ethnography, incorporating autobiographical material into her texts. Her innovative approach, exemplified in her books *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* and *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*, has received both praise and criticism. "Behar . . . is a champion of a relatively new form of anthropology that seems to be driving the fuddy-duddies in academia nuts," Sally Eckhoff wrote for the on-line magazine *Salon* (January 28, 1997). "Combine traditional fieldwork with a researcher's personal experience, she asserts, and you come up with a mode of study that informs the intellect as it grips the emotions—without smashing the delicate subject(s) flat, the way conventional research often does. It takes an extremely clear-eyed and self-critical writer to get an enterprise like this off the ground, and Behar is one of the very few who can swing it." A professor at the University of Michigan, Behar has edited two anthologies—*Bridges to Cuba/Puente a Cuba* (1995), a collection of works by Cuban and Cuban-American writers and artists, and *Women Writing Culture* (1995), which attempts to redefine anthropology from feminist and multicultural perspectives. "What is drawing me and, I believe, other scholars to write personally is a desire to abandon the alienating 'metalanguage' that closes, rather than opens, the doors of academe to all those who wish to enter," Behar wrote for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (June 29, 1994). "Personal writing represents a sustained effort to democratize the academy. Indeed, it emerges from the struggles of those traditionally excluded from the academy, such as women and members of minority groups, to find a voice that acknowledges both their sense of difference and their belated arrival on the scholarly scene."

Ruth Behar was born in Havana, Cuba, on November 12, 1956, during the brutal dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. Her mother, Rebecca (Glinsky) Behar, was the daughter of Ashkenazi Jews who had immigrated to Cuba from Poland and Russia; her father, Alberto Behar, was the son of Sephardic Jews who had immigrated to Cuba from Turkey and traced their roots to 15th-century Spain. In 1492 the Spanish monarchy, in what has been described as religious zeal, forcibly expelled virtually all of the country's Jews. Many of those who fled, like Behar's ancestors, resettled in the Balkans, the Near East, or Turkey, where, despite their exile, they retained aspects of Spanish culture. By the mid-1920s, because of rising Turkish nationalism and the economic upheaval caused by World War I, many in the Sephardic community began to fear for their safety. Behar's paternal grandparents fled to Havana, where her grandfather became a peddler.

In Cuba Behar's father worked as an accountant. Her mother occasionally helped out at her parents' lace shop but mostly stayed home to care for her children—Ruth and her younger brother, Maurice

(nicknamed Mori), who is now a jazz musician and teacher. On January 1, 1959 guerrillas led by Fidel Castro toppled the Batista regime, and Castro turned Cuba into a Communist state. "My parents were very supportive of the revolution because they were in a position to benefit, at least initially," Behar told *Current Biography*, "but as the revolution went on they started to feel threatened because afterwards properties were nationalized, and so . . . my grandparents lost their store." In 1961 the Behar family left Cuba. They lived for a year on a kibbutz in Israel before moving to a Jewish section of the New York City borough of Queens. Many of their neighbors assumed that the Behars were Puerto Rican, because they spoke Spanish, and people often asked young Ruth how someone could be both Cuban and Jewish. After a while a small Jewish Cuban community developed in Queens and an adjoining part of Brooklyn; Cuban friends of Behar's parents settled there, as did Behar's maternal grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. "They were all Cuban, they all spoke Spanish, they all loved Cuban food, they all danced to Cuban music—but at the same time they were Jewish, and it was hard to find that combination anywhere else except among themselves," Behar told *Current Biography*. "My parents' friends actually came to call themselves 'El Grupo,' the group."

When Behar was nine she broke a leg in a car accident; she was encased in a full-body cast (to prevent the uninjured leg from growing longer than the damaged one) and was confined to bed for a year. During that time a private tutor, sent by her school, gave her lessons at home. "The tutor filled my bed with English storybooks and I read voraciously," Behar wrote in *The Vulnerable Observer*. "When I returned to school I was no longer a Spanish-speaking child struggling with English, but among the more gifted kids who would be steered toward 'Special Progress' . . . classes in junior high school." As with many immigrant children, Behar picked up English more quickly than her parents and served as their translator. "I think that experience really made a mark on me and made me think a lot about being a translator between cultures and languages," Behar told *Current Biography*. As a high-school student, she set her sights on gaining entrance to an elite, private university. Her father, however, wanted her to attend Queens College, a division of the City University of New York, so that she could live at home until she married. She found an ally in her mother, who surreptitiously paid the application fee for Wesleyan University, in Middletown, Connecticut. Behar was accepted and became a freshman in the school's College of Letters in 1974.

At Wesleyan Behar felt insecure, as if she had to prove that her admittance had not hinged on her minority status. She turned down a room in university housing where Latino culture was promoted and for a brief period affected a British accent. "Maybe I hadn't just gotten off the boat, but the

world of the academy . . . was a world for which my immigrant milieu had not prepared me," she wrote in *Translated Woman*. "No one in our Grupo of sales clerks, accountants, and engineers turned owners of shoe stores and envelope factories could understand what this College of Letters . . . was about, and they all thought I was wasting my time." Aware that the costs of her education placed a financial strain on her parents, Behar arranged her course load so as to graduate within three years. She spent one semester studying abroad, in Madrid, Spain. At the end of her sophomore year, as required, she took Wesleyan's comprehensive examinations, but she had not studied for them, immersing herself instead in the production of a play by Federico García Lorca. The middling grade she earned shook her confidence. Her spirits lifted when she took a course in anthropology the next semester. "I was in the wilderness then, so the insight that all products of culture, great books included, were social constructions, not timeless monuments that spoke in a universal language, fell upon me like manna," she wrote in *Translated Woman*. "In anthropology I felt I had found an intellectual home. Here, the little shelf of great books was seen for what it was: just one little shelf."

Behar graduated from Wesleyan with a B.A. degree cum laude in 1977. She then entered the graduate program in anthropology at Princeton University, in New Jersey, from which she earned an M.A. degree in 1981. At the suggestion of James Fernandez, the chairman of her department, she studied the tiny, rural town of Santa María del Monte, in the province of León, Spain, for her doctoral thesis. Her research materials included land records, parish registers, and other historical documents as well as her observations of and conversations with people who lived there. "I was really amazed because I didn't know anything about that aspect of Spain. I didn't know that there was still a part of Spain that was very traditional, that still farmed the land in very traditional ways with cows, and they raised sheep, and they kept their animals right in their own houses . . .," Behar told *Current Biography*. "People were very protective of me . . . and they treated me as a kind of granddaughter. Most of the people I worked with at the time were old or in late middle age. They . . . took me in and taught me what they could about their life." The November 1985 issue of *Natural History* included an article by Behar about Santa María del Monte, accompanied by photos she had taken. In 1986 Princeton University Press published her dissertation, with the title *Santa María del Monte: The Presence of the Past in a Spanish Village* and with illustrations by her husband, David Frye, whom she had married in 1982. (The book was reprinted in 1991 with the title and subtitle reversed.) "Behar captures well the sense of the past and its presence in village life, and her attention to the role of the written word is uncommon in cultural anthropology studies of this kind," Joan W. Gartland wrote in a *Library Journal* (July 1986) review. Peter Sahlins,

in the *Journal of Social History* (Winter 1987), described *Santa María del Monte* as "an innovative methodological contribution to a long espoused but seldom practiced marriage of ethnography and history in Europe."

Behar received a Ph.D. in anthropology in 1983. Some months earlier she and her husband, an anthropologist and translator, had moved to Mexiquitic, a small Mexican town. For the next two years, Behar conducted research in Mexico on women who had been accused of witchcraft during the Mexican inquisition (the victims of which were primarily people believed to be practicing Judaism, and which extended from the early 1500s to the early 1800s). For several years after that, she worked alternately in Mexico and the U.S., as a postdoctoral fellow at Johns Hopkins University, in Baltimore, Maryland. She next entered the Michigan Society of Fellows postdoctoral program, at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, where she taught part-time as an assistant professor. When her fellowship was nearing its end, she applied for a full-time University of Michigan teaching position open only to members of minority groups, but she was turned down. "Apparently I was not an authentic enough Latina because my four grandparents had been European Jewish immigrants to Cuba," she wrote in *Translated Woman*. "An extensive genealogy was put together, not unlike the . . . writs of the Inquisition that sought to determine 'purity of blood,' and it was decided that 'my race' wasn't pure Cuban because I had European blood in my veins."

Behar had returned to Mexico, to work on what became *Translated Woman*, when, in 1988, she received word that she had won a MacArthur Fellowship. Commonly known as the "genius" grant, the fellowship is highly prestigious and includes a substantial monetary stipend, paid in five annual installments. Immediately after she learned about the grant, the University of Michigan offered her an associate professorship. She accepted when the university gave her tenure as well. For several months afterward, she suffered from severe panic attacks and agoraphobia, which, according to the University of Michigan News Service (January 28, 1997, on-line), she has attributed to previously buried memories connected with her year in bed. Meanwhile, as she recalled in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (November 4, 1992), she had "vowed that I'd use the aura conferred upon me by the MacArthur award to take big risks in my writing and in the way I practice anthropology. I began to search for ways to explore the intersection of the analytical voice that years of education had drilled into me and the personal voice that I had been taught to leave out of my scholarship." *Translated Woman* blurs genres by combining autobiography with the first-person narrative of a Mexican peddler whom Behar called Esperanza (not her real name). Shortly after she had arrived in Mexiquitic, Behar had begun to hear talk about the peddler; the townspeople suspected that she was a *bruja*

(witch), because she had cursed her philandering, abusive husband, and a short time later he had mysteriously become blind. "Hearing rumors about Esperanza, I was fascinated by the way they echoed the documents I had begun to read from the colonial Mexican inquisition," Behar wrote in *Translated Woman*. "While these colonial women were desperately seeking relief from abusive male dominance, the cultural assignment of mystic powers to women also made them vulnerable to charges of witchcraft, sometimes by the very men who had hurt or shamed them. . . . To hear about Esperanza, a woman living in the present, within the context of these inquisitorial stories, I felt as though history had come alive."

Behar met Esperanza for the first time on the Day of the Dead (actually, two days, November 1 and 2) in 1983, in a local cemetery. Grudgingly, Esperanza allowed Behar to photograph her. They spoke again the next month and slowly became close. At Esperanza's request, Behar and Frye became the godparents of the cake for her daughter Norberta's *quinceañera*, a coming-of-age party that marks a girl's 15th birthday, and she later asked them to serve as the godparents of her *niño Dios*, a doll that represents the baby Jesus in Christmas festivities. Behar and Esperanza were now *comadres*. Such traditional relationships are common in rural Mexico between people of different socioeconomic classes. Behar would provide financial assistance to Esperanza, while Esperanza would give Behar produce or flowers from her garden and show extreme courtesy to Behar when they met in town. Esperanza eagerly shared stories of her life with Behar and became Behar's most valuable informant.

Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story (1993) was pieced together from Behar's recordings and is told largely in Esperanza's voice. In what many critics hailed as a vivid, nuanced recounting, Esperanza emerges as a strong, defiant woman, despite the suffering she endured at the hands of her abusive father and her adulterous husband, and the pain of having to bury many of her children. In an autobiographical chapter at the end of the book, Behar attempted to "articulate the connections between who [Esperanza] is as a visibly invisible Indian street peddler and who I am as an academic woman with a certain measure of power and privilege," as she wrote. She also drew parallels between Esperanza's life and her own and discussed her struggles to come to terms with her Cuban-American identity and to secure her position in academia.

Critics greeted the chapters in *Translated Woman* that focus on Esperanza as an impressive example of ethnography, and some also praised the chapter in which Behar herself is the subject. "This is postmodernist writing at its best," the anthropologist Louise Lamphere wrote for the *Women's Review of Books* (May 1993). "The difficulties of articulating the connections between the American woman academic and Mexican female street ped-

dler, the sense of contradictions in tension, and the lack of an easy resolution are perhaps, paradoxically, the most satisfying aspects of Behar's book. In the end she asks us to embrace dissonance, to get beyond the self/other division that has marked Western thinking." Others found fault with the final chapter. In the *Nation* (September 20, 1993), for example, the journalist Victor Perera, a Guatemalan-born Jew, wrote, "The closing section of *Translated Woman* could stand as a set piece in a larger autobiographical work. For this reader, what is most interesting in it is the balancing of polarities between the university investigator and the poet/essayist, the 'mestizo' Jew and the Cuban Chicana. But does this polemical self-portrait belong in a book about a Mexican peddler? Something rings false in Behar's comparing herself to her comadre as fellow literary wetbacks and victims of the patriarchy. It is disingenuous to compare the suffering Mexican village society inflicts on Esperanza for rebelling against its strictures with the ordeal of having to accept tenure at a prominent university. Esperanza's betrayal of her Mexican mores is not comparable to Behar's determination to be an 'academic traitor.'" Perera concluded, "The final section may make for feisty and innovative feminist anthropology, but it shifts the book's gravitational center in a wrenching way that detracts from more than it contributes to an otherwise powerful and brilliant study." Behar wrote for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (June 29, 1994) that such criticism notwithstanding, "I continue to receive letters from women and men who say that my relating my own story made the book whole for them. A Chicana anthropology student in Los Angeles told me that the book's importance to her was twofold: She could see her mother in Esperanza and herself in me."

Behar's next book was *Women Writing Culture* (1995), a collection of essays by some of the most prominent women in anthropology and ethnography, among them Lila Abu-Lughod, Aihwa Ong, Ellen Lewin, and Barbara Tedlock. Behar co-edited the book with Deborah A. Gordon, who teaches courses in women's studies and postmodernism in anthropology at Wichita State University, in Kansas. *Women Writing Culture* "redefines anthropology through feminist and multicultural eyes," according to the medical writer Francesca Coltrera in a review for Amazon.com. Coltrera also wrote, "At its heart is the 'poetics and politics' of ethnography, an uneasy marriage of art and science that attempts to distill the essence of another person's culture." In a review for *Contemporary Sociology* (January 1997), Sharon Hays, a professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, wrote, "A provocative and often compelling volume, *Women Writing Culture* is a self-conscious attempt to revise the anthropological cannon, include the multiplicity of women's voices, and counter the claim made by James Clifford in the seminal anthology *Writing Culture* (1986), that feminists have not 'produced either unconventional forms of writing or a devel-

oped reflection on ethnographic textuality as such.”

Earlier, in 1979, Behar had traveled to Cuba with a group of students and professors from Princeton. During her next visit, in 1991, she began to establish relationships with Cubans. After she returned to the U.S., she started networking with Cuban Americans in New York, Boston, and Chicago. Behar made several subsequent trips to Cuba. The year 1995 saw the publication of *Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba*, an anthology co-edited by Behar and Juan Leon, a Cuban-American who teaches English at the University of Michigan. In the introduction to the book, Behar described it as a forum in which Cubans could “openly define themselves and dismantle, once and for all, the hurtful stereotypes of the islander as a brain-washed cog of a Marxist state and the immigrant as a soulless worm lacking any concern for social justice.” By her own account, editing the book also served as a way for Behar to “re-engage and connect with Cuba as an adult,” as she said in an interview posted on the Fathom Knowledge Network Web site.

Behar’s next book, *The Vulnerable Observer* (1996), is a collection of essays that blend memoir and ethnography. “No one objects to autobiography, as such, as a genre in its own right,” Behar wrote in one essay. “What bothers critics is the insertion of personal stories into what we have been taught to think of as the analysis of impersonal social facts. Throughout most of the twentieth century, in scholarly fields ranging from literary criticism to anthropology to law, the reigning paradigms have traditionally called for distance, objectivity, and abstraction. The worst sin was to be ‘too personal.’ . . . The charge that all variants of vulnerable writing that have blossomed in the last two decades are self-serving and superficial, full of unnecessary guilt or excessive bravado, stems from an unwillingness to even consider the possibility that a personal voice, if creatively used, can lead the reader, not into miniature bubbles of navel-gazing, but into the enormous sea of serious social issues.” *The Vulnerable Observer* earned mixed reviews. “Behar proves that anthropology can make you cry, but changing her delicate science from a self/other exploration into a self/self trip sometimes strains logic,” Sally Eckhoff wrote for *Salon* (on-line). Judith Bolton-Fasman, by contrast, wrote for the *Jerusalem Report* (May 1, 1997), “That insistent looking back is what makes Ruth Behar’s vision of anthropology so compelling. Memories do not vanish; they recede and leave traces. The anthropologist who makes herself vulnerable to these indications makes the world a more intelligible and hopeful place.”

Behar perceives herself as someone who has always existed in a sort of borderland, caught between different cultures and cultural identities. That is one reason why, as she told *Current Biography*, she is “interested in creating these . . . new kinds of combinations. You sort of find that in all

kinds of human creativity, including cooking. We’re always used to cooking chicken with onion and pepper, but suddenly you add mango and it adds another sort of flavor. It’s sort of the same for me with ethnography. . . . Just all by itself, for me, it’s not a sufficiently exciting genre—so I add autobiography or I make it poetic because I like poetry also. I do things to make these genres more exciting, less predictable, more vivid.”

In 1999 Behar began making a documentary that followed her as she visited what remains of the Sephardic community in Cuba (which shrank when many Jews emigrated after the Communist revolution); in Miami, Florida, where some Cuban Jews settled; and in New York, with members of her family. In 2002 the New York City-based organization Women Make Movies began distributing the film, entitled *Adio Kerida* (*Goodbye Dear Love*). Narrated by the Cuban-American actress Elizabeth Peña, the film had a mixed reception. “*Adio Kerida* . . . at times is moving and informative, but unfortunately becomes too much of a personal quest to be engaging,” Marta Barber wrote for the *Miami Herald* (January 25, 2002). “Behar’s love for her abandoned past is clear, but she doesn’t know how to engage the rest of us in that personal quest.” Robert J. Rosenthal, writing for the *Jewish Bulletin* (November 8, 2002), reacted differently: “Behar . . . puts herself in the film and records many of her own emotional reactions to her exploration. As a postmodern anthropologist trained to avoid cultural exploitation, she brings a refreshing honesty to the current bumper crop of Cuban cultural exports.” *Adio Kerida* has won awards at the Latino Film Festival of the San Francisco Bay Area and the San Antonio CineFestival.

Behar has published several collections of her poetry, in handmade, mimeographed, bilingual chapbooks produced by Ediciones Vigía in Matanzas, Cuba, in editions of no more than 200. Currently, she is writing “Nightgowns from Cuba,” a novel told from the perspective of an Afro-Cuban woman, whom Behar has based on the woman who served as her nanny when she was an infant in Cuba. “If writing this novel brought me to a place where I write novels for the rest of my life, I would be delighted,” she told Michelle Adam for the *Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education* (February 26, 2001). “It would be a wonderful ending to the story.”

In addition to the MacArthur Fellowship, Behar’s honors include a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Award, a Hunting Family Faculty Fellowship from the Institute for the Humanities at the University of Michigan, a Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation Career Development Award, a Rockefeller Residence Fellowship in the Humanities, the Distinguished Alumna Award in Recognition of Outstanding Achievement and Service from Wesleyan University, a Lucius N. Littauer Foundation grant, and the Special Recognition Award from the American Psychological Association. *Latina* magazine named her one

of the 50 Latinas who made history in the 20th century.

Behar and her husband live in Ann Arbor. Their son, Gabriel Frye-Behar, is studying filmmaking at New York University.

—J.C.

Suggested Reading: *Chronicle of Higher Education* A p44 Nov. 4, 1992; *Kenyon Review* p5+ Winter 1997; Ruth Behar Web site; *Salon* (on-line) Jan. 28, 1997; Behar, Ruth. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*, 1996

Selected Books: as writer—*Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*, 1993; *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*, 1996; as co-editor (with Juan Leon)—*Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba*, 1995
